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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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PHOTO: X

Senior political scientist Muzaffar Assadi dies at 63

MYSURU, 4 JAN

Renowned political scientist, senior writer, and former acting vice-chancellor of the University of Mysuru, Professor Muzaffar Hussain Assadi, died in the early hours of Saturday at a private hospital in Bengaluru. He was 63 years old and was recovering from cardiac surgery. Assadi penned over 10 books, including Alpasankhyataru Mattu Jaati Vyavasthe, Colonial and Post-Colonial Identity Politics in South Asia, Zaat/Caste Among Muslims (Routledge Studies in South Asian History), Kathanagalu Mattu Chalavali, and Gandhiya Hind Swaraj (Kannada). His works delved deeply into themes of caste, identity politics, and social equality. A native of Shirva village in Udupi district, Assadi's mortal remains were kept for public viewing at the Muslim Hostel in Saraswathipuram, Mysuru. His last rites were conducted in Mysuru in the presence of family members. *—Salar News*

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CISF jawan shoots himself dead at Surat airport

SURAT, 4 JAN

A jawan belonging to the Central Industrial Security Force allegedly shot himself dead with his service weapon at the Surat International Airport on Saturday, police said. CISF personnel Kisan Singh, 32, died by suicide in a washroom of the airport around 2.10pm, they said. Singh, who hailed from Jaipur and was deployed at the Surat airport, shot himself in the stomach, said NV Bharwad, inspector of Dumas police station. "He was rushed to a private hospital where the doctors declared him dead," Bharvad said. The reason for the extreme step taken by the jawan was not immediately clear, the official said, adding that further investigation is underway. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

30 kids fall ill after eating New Year cake in Mysuru

MYSURU, 4 JAN

As many as 30 primary school students from Manjunatheshwara Vidya Samsthe in Bolanahalli, Hunsur taluk, fell ill after consuming cake during New Year celebrations on Friday. The children exhibited symptoms such as vomiting and diarrhoea, prompting immediate medical attention at Bolanahalli Ayushman Primary Health Centre. Dr Drakshayini, who treated the young patients, confirmed that all students were stable and discharged after receiving care. In response to the incident, Mahadev, the Block Education Officer for Hunsur, visited the health centre and later the school on Saturday to gather information from students and teachers. He has committed to compiling a report for the Block Education Office regarding the situation. *—Salar News*

₹16.85cr scam unearthed in Vijayapura Ambedkar Corp

Bogus docus were made for land meant for landless SC/ST women

BENGALURU, 4 JAN

A land allotment scam worth Rs 16.85 crore has come to light in the Vijayapura District Ambedkar Development Corporation, where bogus documents were created for land that was meant to be distributed to landless women from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

In the wake of the recent revelation of financial irregularities in Karnataka Maharshi Valmiki Scheduled Tribe Development Corporation to the tune of Rs 88 crore, the scam in the Ambedkar Development Corporation was uncovered after Lokayukta sleuths raided several officers' offices based on a complaint.

According to a statement issued by the Lokayukta on Saturday, a person had lodged a complaint alleging that the Vijayapura District Ambedkar Development Corporation did not distribute land to landless women agricultural workers from the Scheduled Castes under the Land Ownership Scheme from 2014 to 2018. Instead, they created fake purchase documents in the names of the beneficiaries and purchased the land without paying the rightful beneficiaries, using the name of the corporation.

The scam was uncovered after Lokayukta sleuths raided several officers' offices based on a complaint *Photo: X*

The accused officers failed to give possession to the SC/ST women, violated the rules, misused government funds, and used the money for their gain, the Lokayukta said.

An inquiry was conducted, and a case was registered at the Vijayapura Lokayukta Police Station on 26 December, 2024, under various sections of the IPC. They carried raids at the office and residences of former district managers of the Ambedkar Development Corporation, Renuka Satarle, SG Hadapada, retired Taluk Development Officer S S Managiri (Retd), and the current district manager and Taluk Development Officer of the corporation over five days, starting 30 December, last year. "Violation of the criteria for selecting beneficiaries under the Land Ownership Scheme was discovered during the search. It was also found that fake documents were created, and non-local persons were made to appear as if they had purchased land under the scheme at their own expense," the Lokayukta said.

"It has also been found that 23 files related to the Land Ownership Scheme from 2012 to 2018 were missing from the office. It has been found that fake purchase deeds, registration, and stamp duty receipts were created in 33 files, causing a loss of approximately Rs. 16.84 crore to the government exchequer," the Lokayukta added. *—PTI*

DELHI ASSEMBLY POLLS

BJP pits Parvesh Verma against Kejri in first list

Parvesh Verma; Arvind Kejriwal *PHOTO: PTI*

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

BJP on Saturday released its first list of 29 candidates for the Delhi Assembly polls, fielding former MP Parvesh Verma from the New Delhi seat against ex-chief minister and AAP Supremo Arvind Kejriwal. It has named another former MP Ramesh Bidhuri from Kalkaji, where Chief Minister and AAP candidate Atishi is in the fray.

The New Delhi seat, held by Kejriwal since 2013, will witness the former chief minister taking on the sons of two other former chief ministers.

Verma is the son of Sahib Singh Verma, who had a two-year tenure as chief minister in the 1990s. Former West Delhi MP Verma started his preparations for contesting from the seat even before he was announced as the official candidate, saying he had been given the go-ahead by national leaders. Former Delhi Congress president Arvinder Singh Lovely has been fielded from the Gandhi Nagar seat in east Delhi, replacing incumbent BJP MLA Anil Bajpai.

Tarvinder Singh Marwah, who joined BJP in 2022, will contest from the same seat.

He is pitted against senior AAP leader and former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia.

Raaj Kumar Anand, who resigned as a minister and quit AAP earlier this year, was fielded from the Patel Nagar seat.

Chhatarpur MLA Kartar Singh, who also switched to the saffron party from AAP, has been fielded from the same seat.

ND Sharma will contest as a BJP candidate from Badarpur.

BJP national secretary Manjinder Singh Sirsa will contest from Rajouri Garden, which he had won in the 2015 elections. Former Congress councillor Kumari Rinku is the BJP's candidate from Seemapuri. *—PTI*

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DALAI LAMA IN TOWN

Spiritual guru Dalai Lama in Bengaluru on Saturday; Tibetans wait to get a glimpse of Dalai Lama. He will stay in the City for a day before heading to Bylakuppe for a month-long stay *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

HSRP deadline extended to 31 Jan

BENGALURU, 4 JAN

The Karnataka State Transport Department has extended the deadline for installing High-Security Registra-tion Plates (HSRPs) to 31 January, marking the sixth extension. Previously set for 31 December, the extension gives vehicle owners more time to comply with the requirement.

Failure to install the HSRP plates will restrict services such as ownership transfers and address updates. Ve-hicle owners can sign up for installation online through two authorized websites: bookmyhsrp.com and si-am.in.

Despite multiple extensions, thousands of vehicle owners, especially those with vehicles registered before 2019, have yet to affix the mandatory HSRP plates. *—Salar News*

JD(S) LEADER MURDERED IN CHIKKABALLAPUR VILLAGE

CHIKKABALLAPUR, 4 JAN

An unidentified assailant has murdered JD(S) leader Venkatesh, aged 52, in Thammanayakanahalli village, Chikkaballapur taluk. The incident occurred late last night as Venkatesh was returning home from Chikkaballapur. Reports indicate he was attacked in front of a medical shop, and when he attempted to flee, he was pursued and brutally killed. Sources suggest Venkatesh had recently been involved in a confrontation with a couple of villagers from a neighbouring area. Chikkaballapur MP K Sudhakar, and Kolar MP M Mallesha Babu, urged law enforcement to take swift action to apprehend those responsible for this tragic event. *—Salar News*

BBMP garbage truck runs over 2 women in B'luru

BENGALURU 4 JAN

Two sisters, Nazia, 30 and Irfana 32, residents of Govindapura, Bengaluru, were tragically killed on Saturday morning when their scooter was crushed by a BBMP garbage truck near Elements Mall in the Hennur traffic police station limits. The incident occurred around 11.20am on Thanisandra Main Road. Preliminary investigations revealed that a speeding motorcyclist attempted to overtake the women from the left side. In a bid to avoid a collision, the women panicked and tried to manoeuvre their scooter away, but lost control and fell under the truck's wheels. Police have sent the bodies for post-mortem and registered a case. The driver of the BBMP truck has been detained for questioning, including alcohol testing. Authorities are also working to trace the motorcyclist involved.

"Further investigation is ongoing to ascertain all details surrounding the accident," a senior traffic police officer stated. *—Salar News*

TATA
GPS Map Camera
Bengaluru, Karnataka, भारत
2, Thanisandra Main Rd, Bharath Nagar, Manayata Tech Park, Thanisandra, Bengaluru, Karnataka 560024, भारत
Lat 13.048378° Long 77.629184°
04/01/25 11:40 AM GMT +05:30
Google

According to reports, in a bid to avoid a collision, the women tried to manoeuvre their scooter away, but fell under the truck *PHOTO: SALAR*

LIFE SPROUTS IN SPACE

ISRO germinates cowpea seeds in space

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on Saturday said the cowpea seeds it had sent to space onboard the PSLV-C60 POEM-4 platform have germinated under microgravity conditions within four days of the launch of the mission.

The space agency sent eight cowpea seeds as part of the Compact Research Module for Orbital Plant Studies (CROPS) experiment conducted by the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) to study plant growth in microgravity conditions.

"Life sprouts in space! VSSC's CROPS experiment onboard PSLV-C60 POEM-4 successfully sprouted cowpea seeds in 4 days. Leaves expected soon," ISRO said in a post on X.

ISRO sent eight cowpea seeds to study plant growth in microgravity conditions *PHOTO: ISRO*

The PSLV-C60 mission placed two SpaDeX satellites in orbit on the night of December 30. The fourth stage of the rocket carrying the POEM-4 platform has been orbiting the earth with 24 onboard experiments at an altitude of 350 km since Tuesday.

The CROPS experiment aims to understand how plants grow in the unique conditions of space, which is essential for future long-duration space missions.

The experiment involves growing eight cowpea seeds in a controlled environment with active thermal regulation, simulating conditions that plants might encounter during extended space travel. Passive measurements, including camera imaging, oxygen and carbon dioxide concentrations, relative humidity, temperature, and soil moisture monitoring, are available for plant growth and monitoring, the space agency said. The chaser satellite is expected to dock with the target satellite in space on Tuesday, a feat that would make India only the fourth country to master this cutting-edge technology after Russia, the US and China. *—PTI*

Veteran nuclear scientist Chidambaram dies at 88

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

Rajagopala Chidambaram *PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA*

Renowned physicist Dr. Rajagopala Chidambaram, who played a pivotal role in India's nuclear tests in 1974 and 1998, has passed away at the age of 88, according to the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE). He died on Saturday morning at Jaslok Hospital in Mumbai.

In a statement, the DAE expressed profound sorrow at Chidambaram's passing, noting his influential contributions to India's scientific and strategic capabilities. Born in 1936, Chidambaram was an alumnus of Presidency College in Chennai and the Indian Institute of Science in Bengaluru. Over his illustrious career, he held numerous prestigious positions, including Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India from 2001 to 2018, Director of the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre from 1990 to 1993, and Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission.

He was instrumental in shaping India's nuclear capabilities and led the teams responsible for the country's first nuclear test and the Pokhran-II tests, establishing India's status as a global nuclear power. His research in high-pressure physics and materials science significantly advanced these fields.*—PTI*

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Speeding truck kills man on Hebbal flyover

BENGALURU, 4 JAN

A 42-year-old man died on way to hospital after a speeding canter truck knocked him down while he was crossing the Hebbal flyover on an electric scooter late on Friday. According to the police, the incident took place around 9.15pm when Manohar Vinayak, a manager at a private firm in the city, was returning from work. A canter truck hit his scooter from the rear and sped away. Manohar, who sustained severe injuries, died while he was being taken to a nearby hospital, the police said. The incident led to traffic congestion on the flyover for about 20 minutes. Police sent the body for autopsy and have started an investigation. *—Salar News*

Ceiling plaster collapse injures 4 children in Kolar

KOLAR, 4 JAN

Three children at an anganavadi in Dasarahosahalli in Bangarpet sustained minor injuries and a five-year-old girl suffered fracture on her leg when a portion of plaster from the ceiling fell on them on Saturday morning. The injured children were taken to Bangarpet hospital where they are recovering. A surgery was performed on Parinitha, who suffered leg fracture, said Muniraju, the child development project officer of Bangarpet taluk. Villagers rushed to the spot and took the injured to the hospital, Muniraju said. Muniraju said the anganavadi building was only 12 years old and no crack was seen earlier. The plaster might have come loose because of the recent rains in the area, he said. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: X

2 arrested in fake call centre cyber fraud in City

BENGALURU, 4 JAN

The city police on Friday conducted a raid at a call centre near Hulimavu police station and uncovered a cybercrime operation involving stock trading. The police also arrested two persons, Jithendra Kumar (Jithu), 25, a native of Bihar and Chandan Kumar, 33, during the raid. Police also seized mobile phones, laptops, computers and personal data of 9,000 individuals. The call centre, disguised as Fenix Interiors had been operating on Bannerghatta Road without a SEBI license for more than a year. It had 15 employees. Jithu sourced data of demat account holders from dark web. The scammers charged a 30 per cent commission on profits, though most clients incurred losses. They regularly replaced SIM cards to evade detection, the police said. Deputy Commissioner (South-East) Sarah Fathima said Jithu is suspected to have been earning more than Rs 18 lakh. Police have registered a case under cybercrime laws and an investigation is on. *—Salar News*

2 teens killed in Gadag car crash, 1 injured

GADAG, 4 JAN

Two students were killed and another injured – all 16 years old – when car driven by one of them hit an electric pole and overturned near Hulakoti Engineering College in Gadag taluk on Friday night, police said. Police identified the deceased as Mohammed Mujawar and Sanjeev Giraddi. Aashish Gundur survived the mishap with injuries. He is under treatment in a hospital in Gadag. Eyewitnesses told the police that the car hit the pole at a high speed and spun twice before coming to a stop. The students were returning home from their school, Rajeshwari Vidyaniketan in Hulakoti, after attending the annual gathering. The Gadag rural police have registered a case. *—Salar News*

BJP protests seeking Priyank Kharge's resignation

BJP demands a CBI inquiry into contractor's death

KALABURAGI, 4 JAN

BJP on Saturday staged a protest here demanding the resignation of Minister Priyank Kharge in connection with the suicide of a Bidar-based civil contractor.

BJP State President BY Vijayendra, Leader of Opposition in Legislative Assembly R Ashoka, Legislative Council Leader of Opposition Chalavadi Narayanaswamy led the protest.

The saffron party leaders gathered at Jagat Circle in large numbers holding placards, raising slogans against the Minister amid tight security presence.

As BJP planned lay siege to Kharge's residence, the Minister decided to counter them in a unique way. Police personnel were also seen deployed outside the residence as a precautionary measure to avoid any untoward incident.

"We have ordered tender coconuts, coffee, tea, bottled drinking water for the BJP leaders who will get tired after the protest," a Kharge supporter told PTI.

BJP leaders gathered at Jagat Circle in Kalaburagi holding placards, raising slogans against Priyank Kharge **PHOTO: X@BJP4KARNATAKA**

Reacting to the protest, Kharge told reporters that neither he nor the government will succumb to the opposition's demand and pressure tactics.

He said there are several cases against the BJP leaders, including a case under the POCSO Act against former Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa.

Yediyurappa is the father Y Vijayendra and Shivamogga MP B Y Raghavendra.

Mounting pressure on the ruling Congress, the BJP has reiterated its demand for a CBI inquiry into the contractor's suicide and resignation of Kharge.

Civil contractor Sachin Panchal on 26 December allegedly died by suicide by lying before a moving train in Bidar district.

In his suicide note, he accused Priyank Kharge's close aide Raju Kapanur of compelling him to take the drastic step. He alleged that he was receiving death threats to pay rupees one crore to Kapanur who rejected the charges. Priyank too said he had no role in the case as the suicide note did not name him. He also demanded an inquiry into the case to bring out the truth. *—PTI*

BJP said cowsheds are being shut citing lack of sufficient cows **PHOTO: ANI**

BJP flays govt for axing Goshala scheme

BENGALURU, 4 JAN

The Opposition BJP has accused the Congress government of allegedly discontinuing the Goshala Project aimed at protecting cows in the state.

Under the scheme launched during the previous BJP regime, 35 cowsheds were sanctioned across the state.

"Protecting cows is like protecting the culture of this land. The stand of the Congress government, which has abandoned the decision of our previous @BJP4Karnataka government, which had launched a project to open a cow school in all the districts," BJP posted on X.

BJP said cowsheds are being shut citing lack of sufficient cows. "The absence of cows in Goshalas is just an excuse. If the intention was sincere, these facilities would have already been actively functioning. How can we expect a commitment to preserve and develop Goshalas from the Congress government, which always worries about beef eaters?" the BJP said. However, the Siddaramaiah government said there was no decision to scrap the Goshala scheme.

Minister HK Patil said the cabinet also granted administrative approval to strengthen the existing 14 Goshalas. *—PTI*

'MEET DEADLINES'

Complete all Central schemes by fiscal year end: HDK

MYSURU, 4 JAN

Union Minister of Steel and Heavy Industries HD Kumaraswamy on Saturday directed district-level officials to ensure that all Centre-sponsored schemes are implemented by the end of the financial year and the benefits reached the targeted people.

The minister issued the directive while chairing a meeting of district development coordination and monitoring committees held at the Zilla Panchayat Hall in Mysuru city to review the implementation of Centre-sponsored schemes.

Kumaraswamy He also directed the Karnataka Industrial Areas Development Board (KIADB) to expedite land handover to the Airport Authority of India to expand the Mysore Airport runway and to South-Western Railways to upgrade the Naganahalli terminal.

He also instructed the officials to complete the Jal Jeevan Mission and Amrut scheme on time and ensure round-the-clock drinking water supply to all households. He asked the District Lead Bank manager to distribute more collateral free MUDRA loans under the Rs 2920-crore scheme to promote trade and business activities.

Kumaraswamy instructed the officials to bring all farmers under crop insurance cover and ensure the quality of seeds supplied to them. He also asked the officials to expedite vaccination of cattle against foot and mouth disease. Citing unemployment as the biggest bane of the state, the minister instructed the officials chalk out plans to support skill development and self employment. *—Salar News*

Counter-culture key to reclaiming democracy: Yogendra Yadav

BENGALURU, 4 JAN

Social transformation requires protesting against oppressive systems and fostering a new, humane culture, Professor Yogendra Yadav said on Saturday.

Speaking at an event organised to commemorate the 100th birth anniversary of renowned philosopher and writer Sebastian Kappen in Bengaluru, the leader of Swaraj India, delivered a thought-provoking keynote address, reflecting on democracy and the ideas of Kappen.

Highlighting Kappen's vision of social transformation, Yadav noted that Kappen, as a committed socialist, championed counter-culture as a powerful tool to challenge societal injustices.

Critiquing the current state of democracy, Yadav argued that while democracy is often idealised, it remains vulnerable to exploitation. He urged the public to engage beyond the electoral process, emphasising that "democracy cannot be protected in Parliament; it is defended by the people on the streets." He also addressed the dangers of religious intolerance, referencing Kappen's analysis of the Babri Masjid demolition in 1992 as an example of "mythocracy"—the use of mythical narratives to justify oppressive political agendas. He further said that , "For the last 10 years, we've been buying medicines and then searching for the relevant diseases. Demonetisation is the best example of this."

Leader of Swaraj India, Prof Yogendra Yadav said, while democracy is often idealised, it remains vulnerable to exploitation **PHOTO: X/@_YOGENDRAYADAV**

He pointed out the nation's glaring inequalities in access to wealth and education.

Criticising the "lapdog media," Yadav further said that it largely serves the privileged sections of society and fails to hold power to account. "Safeguarding democracy requires people to have a keen sense of independence, self-respect, and unity," he added. *—Salar News*

WIFE AND IN-LAWS GET BAIL IN TECHIE SUICIDE

BENGALURU, 4 JAN

A Bengaluru court granted bail on Saturday to Nikita Singhania, her mother Nisha Singhania, and her brother Anurag Singhania, in the case related to the suicide of techie Atul Subhash, which gained nationwide attention.

On 9 December, Atul left a detailed death note accusing his estranged wife, Nikita, and her family of harassment before taking his life. Following his death, police arrested Nikita, her mother, and her brother. They had applied for bail in the Bengaluru Sessions Court.

The Karnataka High Court had earlier directed the Sessions Court to expedite the hearing and dispose of the bail plea swiftly. Acting on this, the Sessions Court granted bail to the accused on Saturday. Nikita was arrested in Gurugram on 14 December, while her mother and brother were detained in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh. Atul had alleged harassment, extortion attempts, and false cases by his wife. *—Salar News*

Indian languages key to culture, unity: Bihar Guv

MYSURU, 4 JAN

Bihar Governor Arif Mohammad Khan on Saturday emphasised that all languages spoken in India are not just dialects of Mother Saraswati, but also key to the country's heritage, culture, and civilisation. He made these remarks at the joint regional official language conference for South and South Western regions, organised by the Department of Official Language, Ministry of Home Affairs, at KSOU campus.

He urged the nation to prioritise Indian languages, particularly Hindi, for communication, as they reflect India's culture and civilisation. He emphasised the importance of learning other Indian languages to expand knowledge, but stressed there should be no competition. Khan highlighted initiatives like 'Hindi Shabd Sindhu,' a digital dictionary, and the Bhartiya Bhasha Anubhag, noting that over five lakh words have been added to 'Hindi Shabd Sindhu,' including around 25,000 from other Indian languages. *—Salar News*

CHITRA SANTHE

The premises of Karnataka Chitrakala Parishat decorated for the 22nd edition of Chitra Santhe, the annual art fair in Bengaluru, on Saturday. CM Siddaramaiah will inaugurate the event on 5 January **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Political tension rises in Kolar over 2 official posts

KOLAR, 4 JAN

Political interference in Kolar district has led to a tense situation, with four officials vying for two prominent posts. The positions in dispute are the Tahasildar of Bangarpet taluk and the Range Forest Officer (RFO) of Mulbagal taluk. While these transfers might seem routine, political influence is seen as the underlying cause of the conflict.

In Bangarpet, Venkateshappa, who had been serving as Tahasildar for five months, was transferred and Sujatha was posted as his replacement on 31 December. However, Venkateshappa challenged the transfer in the Karnataka Administrative Tribunal which granted him a stay. On 1 January, Venkateshappa attempted to assume charge, but Sujatha was holding a closed-door meeting with office staff. Later, Venkateshappa began working in another room and later met with the Deputy Commissioner to update him on the situation. Bangarpet MLA SN Narayanaswamy, reportedly dissatisfied with Venkateshappa's performance, is believed to have influenced the government's decision to transfer him.

In Mulbagal, Jyothi, the outgoing officer, was transferred to Channarayapattana, and Shalini was posted as the new RFO. When Shalini arrived to assume charge, Jyothi reportedly locked her office chamber, preventing Shalini from taking over. Despite senior forest department officials directing Jyothi to hand over the position, she reportedly ignored the orders. *—Salar News*

CIVIL RIGHTS ADVOCATE

Senior political scientist, writer Muzaffar H Assadi dies at 63

MYSURU, 4 JAN

Renowned political scientist, senior writer, and former acting vice-chancellor of the University of Mysuru, Professor Muzaffar Hussain Assadi, died in the early hours of Saturday at a private hospital in Bengaluru. He was 63 years old and was recovering from cardiac surgery.

Assadi penned over 10 books, including Alpasankhyataru Mattu Jaati Vyavasthe, Colonial and Post-Colonial Identity Politics in South Asia, Zaat/Caste Among Muslims (Routledge Studies in South Asian History), Kathanagalu Mattu Chalavali, and Gandhiya Hind Swaraj (Kannada). His works delved deeply into themes of caste, identity politics, and social equality.

Muzaffar Hussain Assadi's report on forest tribes played a crucial role in preventing large-scale displacement of Adivasis **PHOTO: FB**

A native of Shirva village in Udupi district, Assadi's mortal remains were kept for public viewing at the Muslim Hostel in Saraswathipuram, Mysuru. His last rites were conducted in Mysuru in the presence of family members.

Assadi completed his post-graduation at Mangalore University, followed by an MPhil and PhD from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

He pursued postdoctoral studies at the University of Chicago.

During his tenure at the University of Mysore, he served as the Head of the Department of Political Science, Dean of the Arts Faculty, and later, the Special Officer for Raichur University before retiring last year.

His work on tribal displacement as Chairperson of the High Court Committee was particularly impactful. The High Court accepted his comprehensive report on forest tribes, which played a crucial role in preventing large-scale displacement of Adivasis in Karnataka.

Assadi's research extended to agricultural studies, globalization, Gandhian philosophy, political sociology, democratic theories, comparative governance, social movements, gender rights, farmer suicides, human rights, and global political theories.

His latest book, Colonial and Post-Colonial Identity Politics in South Asia – Zaat/Caste Among Muslims, offered rare insights into the complexities of caste among Muslims.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah expressed deep sorrow at Assadi's demise, calling him "a proud son of Karnataka" and a personal advisor and well-wisher.

In his condolence message, Siddaramaiah noted that Assadi's scholarly contributions brought international recognition to the state and described his passing as a profound loss.

Kannada writer Rahamat Tarikere called Assadi a "people's scholar" and a student-friendly professor who tirelessly worked to uplift oppressed communities. Tarikere urged the government to implement Assadi's recommendations on tribal displacement as a tribute to his enduring legacy.

The People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), Mysuru, also mourned his loss.

PUCL President Kamal Gopinath and General Secretary V Purushottam described his passing as a significant void for people's movements and civil rights advocacy. *—Salar News*

YS Jagan flays CM Naidu over unfulfilled promises

AMARAVATI, 4 JAN

YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, leader of the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP), has accused Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu of failing to honour key electoral commitments, particularly the "Super Six" schemes, even seven months into his term. The Super Six initiatives include a monthly pension of Rs 1,500 for women aged 19 to 59, 20 lakh jobs for youth or Rs 3,000 in unemployment assistance, and free bus travel for women. Reddy expressed frustration over Naidu's inaction on the 'Talliki Vandanam' scheme, which promised Rs 15,000 annually for each school-going child, stating that the pledge has not been fulfilled this year following a cabinet decision. He contrasted this with government's 'Amma Vodi', which had disbursed Rs 26,067 crore. —*PTI*

5 arrested for Malda TMC councillor's murder

MALDA, 4 JAN

Police on Saturday said they have so far arrested five persons in connection with the murder of Malda English Bazar Trinamool Congress councillor Dulal Sarkar. Sarkar, described by West Bengal Chief Minister Banerjee as a close associate of hers and a popular leader, was shot dead by miscreants in Malda district on Thursday morning. Two men were arrested on Friday after apprehending three others on the day of the murder, taking the total number of arrests in the case to five, a senior police officer said. The arrested accused persons were identified by the police as Bihar's Katihar district natives Sameer Akhtar, Mohammad Abdul Gani and Malda residents Tinku Ghosh, Abhijeet Ghosh and Amit Raja. —*PTI*

BJP leader shot at over parking issue in Jammu, 1 held

Jammu, 4 JAN

Police have arrested a government employee for allegedly opening fire at a BJP youth leader following an altercation over a parking issue here, officials said Saturday. During the argument, a scuffle broke out between the two. Ravinder Singh then took out his licensed pistol and fired two rounds at Advocate Kanav Sharma, the spokesperson said. Kanav was immediately shifted to Sarwal Hospital, where he received first aid, and was later referred to GMC for further treatment. Meanwhile, Ravinder Singh fled the scene, the spokesperson added. A manhunt was launched for Ravinder Singh and he was apprehended. The weapon used in the crime was also recovered, the official said. Kanav Sharma is the president of Bhartiya Janata Yuva Morcha of Jammu district and the son of senior BJP leader Chander Mohan Sharma. —*PTI*

PHOTO: FB

MLA Uma Thomas taken off ventilator, shifted to ICU

Kochi, 4 JAN

Congress MLA Uma Thomas, who sustained injuries after falling from a 15-foot-high VIP gallery at a stadium here last week, was taken off the ventilator and shifted to the intensive care unit on Saturday. Her lung condition is satisfactory despite a pulmonary contusion, according to a medical bulletin issued by the hospital where she has been receiving treatment since the day of the accident. The vitals and counts of the injured MLA remain stable, the bulletin said, detailing the reasons for taking her off the ventilator. As she has not yet recovered from the critical condition, Thomas will continue to remain in the intensive care unit, it added. —*PTI*

Kejri: BJP-Cong should declare poll alliance

Women protest outside Kejriwal's home over failure of Rs 1,000 per month promise

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday said the Congress and the BJP should formally declare their alliance, amid the two opposition parties sharpening their attacks on the former chief minister ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls.

Kejriwal also took a dig at the Congress, saying barring a few mediapersons, people had stopped taking the party "seriously".

AAP has also demanded action against senior Congress leader Ajay Maken for allegedly calling Kejriwal "anti-national" and threatened to approach other parties of the INDIA bloc for removing the grand old party from the grouping.

Earlier on Saturday, some women protested outside Kejriwal's Firozshah Road residence, demanding payment of a monthly honorarium of Rs 1,000 in Punjab, which is also governed by AAP.

Former Delhi CM and AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal addresses a press conference, in New Delhi PHOTO: PTI

In a press conference, Kejriwal claimed the protesting women were from the Congress and the BJP.

"These women belong to the Congress and the BJP, not Punjab. All women in Punjab stand with AAP. They trust us," he asserted.

He further said, "The Congress and the BJP should officially declare that they are contesting the elections against AAP in an alliance. This covert, behind-the-scenes collaboration is unacceptable."

Meanwhile, Kejriwal on Saturday promised to waive the "inflated" water bills received by people in Delhi if his party returns to power in the upcoming assembly polls in the national capital next month. —*PTI*

'Instead of creating infra, Kejri built sheesh mahal'

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday slammed Arvind Kejriwal for building a "sheesh mahal" for himself instead of creating infrastructure in the capital during his nearly 10-year term as Delhi chief minister, saying the AAP convenor will have to give an account for it.

Addressing an event after inaugurating a working women's hostel -- Sushma Bhavan -- of the New Delhi Municipal Corporation, Shah listed a host of expensive items and appliances used in Kejriwal's official residence as the chief minister, saying he had never heard of some of those things.

When Kejriwal entered politics, he vowed not to take a government car or bungalow, and promised to herald a new kind of politics, Shah said.

PHOTO: ANI

BJP has been using the term "sheesh mahal", a colloquial Hindi term for an opulent house, to target Kejriwal.

"Kejriwal Ji, you will have to give an account to the people of Delhi. They are demanding answers from you," Shah said.

Taking a swipe, Shah said he had suggested to Kejriwal on X that he should allow people of Delhi to take a tour of the "sheesh mahal" so that they could see what kind of home their chief minister lived in. —*PTI*

Delhi parties go tech-savvy, use AI for campaigns

With Assembly elections in Delhi due in February, political parties are using Artificial Intelligence to churn out creative ads and visuals -- projecting their leaders as heroes and targeting rivals with sharp jibes. From calling its supremo Arvind Kejriwal the "GOAT" (Greatest of All Time) to portraying him as "Delhi ka Beta" (Son of Delhi), the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is creatively leveraging AI in its campaigns. —*PTI*

Massive security deployed in Manipur after attack on SP

IMPHAL, 4 JAN

Security was beefed up in Manipur's Kangpokpi district where the SP was injured in a mob attack for failing to "remove" the central armed forces as per the demands of Kuki groups, officials said on Saturday.

A mob on Friday evening attacked the office of Superintendent of Police M Prabhakar, throwing stones and other "projectiles" to vent their anger over the continued deployment of central forces, particularly the BSF and the CRPF, in the Saibol village.

Vehicles of district police kept within the compound of the SP's office were vandalised. Prabhakar was injured after being hit on the forehead by some projectile, officials said.

A senior officer in Imphal said a huge contingent of security forces have been deployed in the area.

In a statement, the police said that besides stones, the protestors attacked the SP office with petrol bombs.

The SP is "fine now and presently leading the joint security forces in tackling the situation", it added.

A few protesters, who sustained injuries during the clashes, were also been admitted to hospital, officials said.

Locals claimed that several people were injured in the action by the security forces that happened in Saibol village in Twiching PHOTO: PTI

Locals claimed that several people were injured in the action by the security forces that happened in Saibol village in Twiching, which is located in the so-called 'buffer zone' between the Kuki-held Hills and Meitei-dominated Imphal Valley. —*PTI*

Kharge: BJP exploits Manipur unrest, PM culpable

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

After fresh violence erupted in Manipur, the Congress on Saturday hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi and said he could not escape the constitutional culpability of not following "rajdharma".

In a post on X, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge alleged that the BJP had some vested interest in keeping the border state on the boil.

"The BJP is the matchstick which burnt Manipur!" he said in his post.

"Your incompetent and shameless chief minister has expressed regret but has conveniently brazened out your absence in the state," he alleged. —*PTI*

'CHADAR' ON PM'S BEHALF

Union Minister for Minority Affairs Kiren Rijiju at the shrine of Sufi saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti to offer a ceremonial 'chadar' on behalf of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in Ajmer, Rajasthan, on Saturday PHOTO: PTI

3 held in Beed sarpanch murder case; all-party march organised

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, 4 JAN

Police have arrested three individuals, including two absconding suspects, in connection with the murder of Beed sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh, which occurred on 9 December. The arrested suspects, Sudarshan Chandrabhan Ghule and Sudhir Sangle, were apprehended in Pune, while another suspect, Siddharth Sonawane, was detained in Kalyan. Ghule and Sangle are named in the FIR for the murder, while Sonawane is believed to have coordinated the sarpanch's movements.

They were remanded in 14-day CID custody on Saturday by a court in Kej in Maharashtra's Beed district.

PHOTO: X

Deshmukh was allegedly abducted and murdered for attempting to thwart an extortion bid related to a wind energy project in Beed. As the investigation unfolds, police have arrested seven individuals, but one suspect remains at large. Amid these developments, political tensions have heightened; BJP MLA Suresh Dhas accused Maharashtra minister Dhananjay Munde of being more involved than his arrested aide, Walmik Karad.

An all-party march was held in Parbhani, calling for a deeper investigation into the case. Public representatives and local leaders participated, demanding justice for Deshmukh and urging the government to ensure a thorough probe without political interference. NCP (SP) MLA Sandip Kshirsagar named specific demands, including a fast-track trial and Munde's resignation during the investigation. The situation reflects the broader concerns regarding law enforcement and political accountability in Maharashtra. —*PTI*

Cong launches 'Jai Bhim' campaign against Shah

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

Congress has announced the launch of a 'Jai Bapu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan' campaign to press for the resignation of Union Home Minister Amit Shah for "insulting" BR Ambedkar, the principal architect of India's Constitution.

Congress leader Pawan Khera said under the campaign, party leaders will organise 'Chaupals' in every district and tell people how the BJP-RSS has been insulting Ambedkar.

Launched on 3 January, the campaign will culminate on 26 January with a grand rally at Mhow in Madhya Pradesh. —*PTI*

NSA Sullivan to seal key plans in India

WASHINGTON, 4 JAN

Outgoing US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan is set to visit India on 5 and 6 January for crucial discussions with his Indian counterpart, Ajit Doval, and other senior officials. This visit marks Sullivan's last official trip to India before the Biden administration concludes its term, with Congressman Michael Waltz expected to succeed him on 20 January.

During his visit, Sullivan will deliver a significant speech at the Indian Institute of Technology in New Delhi, emphasising the importance of the US-India partnership in areas such as defence, space, and emerging technologies. White House officials have highlighted this relationship as a major legacy achievement of the Biden administration, noting its bipartisan support.

The talks will cover a wide range of topics, including advancements in civil nuclear cooperation, strategies for managing China's industrial overcapacity, and collaboration on artificial intelligence and cybersecurity. The US delegation aims to finalise ongoing initiatives and explore new opportunities for future cooperation, particularly in commercial space and green energy technology.

Sullivan's discussions will also include meetings with Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and business leaders, focusing on strengthening people-to-people and company-to-company ties. The Biden administration intends to express gratitude for the close partnership developed between President Biden and Prime Minister Modi over the past four years while underscoring the potential for continued collaboration in the future, particularly in strategic technology and innovation fields. —*PTI*

WB minister Babul, BJP MP Abhijit clash over honking

KOLKATA, 4 JAN

West Bengal minister Babul Supriyo and BJP MP Abhijit Gangopadhyay entered into a verbal spat on Vidyasagar bridge across river Hooghly over alleged blowing of car horn.

While Supriyo claimed that the Tamluk MP used foul language against him, Gangopadhyay maintained that it was the minister who had used unparliamentary language against him on Friday night.

"Babul Supriyo stopped my vehicle and used foul language," Gangopadhyay said, claiming that the minister was apparently protesting the blowing of horn, which he said occurred behind another car and not that of Supriyo's vehicle.

Gangopadhyay, a former judge of the Calcutta High Court, said that Supriyo had stepped out of his car and used foul language against him.

Supriyo, the West Bengal Information Technology and Electronics minister, however, claimed that he had only wanted to tell Gangopadhyay that his vehicle was being driven fast using a hooter.

PHOTO: PTI

- Gangopadhyay, a former judge of the Calcutta High Court, said that Supriyo had stepped out of his car and used foul language

"But he (Gangopadhyay) used foul language against me as I approached him," the singer-turned-politician said.

In October last year, TMC MP Kalyan Banerjee and BJP's Abhijit Gangopadhyay were involved in an ugly spat during a meeting of the parliamentary committee on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill. —*PTI*

OPPOSITION ATTACKED

Some spread venom through caste: PM

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has condemned opposition parties for inciting division in society through caste politics, urging citizens to counter such efforts to enhance the shared culture and heritage of rural communities.

Inaugurating the Grameen Bharat Mahotsav, Modi underscored his government's commitment to rural development since 2014, emphasising that villages will be essential in achieving a 'Viksit Bharat' (developed India) by 2047. He specifically called out leaders from the Congress and the INDIA bloc, who have been advocating for a caste census, asserting that these attempts weaken the social fabric.

"Ensuring a dignified life for those in rural India is a priority for my government," Modi stated, highlighting initiatives aimed at improving living conditions, such as the construction of toilets under the Swachh Bharat Mission and the provision of pucca houses through the PM Awaas Yojana. He also noted the widespread access to clean drinking water and healthcare facilities provided through various schemes.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with founder and CEO of Vianai Systems Vishal Sikka during a meeting, in New Delhi, on Saturday PHOTO: PTI

The Prime Minister reported significant advancements in rural consumption and economic conditions, citing data that indicates an increase in spending on non-food items and a reduction in rural poverty from approximately 26 per cent in 2012 to below 5 per cent by 2024, according to a recent SBI study.

- Inaugurating the Grameen Bharat Mahotsav, Modi underscored his government's commitment to rural development since 2014, emphasising that villages will be essential in achieving a 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman added that banks are actively implementing government schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana and PM Mudra.

The Grameen Bharat Mahotsav, running from 4 to 9 January, is themed "Building a Resilient Rural India for a 'Viksit Bharat 2047" and aims to foster infrastructure development and innovation within rural communities. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

India can beat Coachella in scale: Diljit tells PM

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

India has the potential to host music festivals that are bigger in scale than renowned global events like Coachella, Punjabi singer-actor Diljit Dosanjh said during his meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on New Year day. The popular singer met the prime minister at his residence on Wednesday, wherein they discussed music, culture and India's artistic legacy. Modi asked Dosanjh about his experience of travelling outside of India and performing at various global festivals like the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival in April 2023. "I feel they have made festivals like Coachella very big. And I believe we can make it much bigger. People travel from all over the world for such festivals," said the 40-year-old singer. —*PTI*

UP sub-inspector killed in east Delhi hit-and-run

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

A 47-year-old Uttar Pradesh Police sub-inspector was killed in an alleged hit-and-run at east Delhi's Telco T-point flyover, police said on Saturday. The police received a call about the accident at 10:35 pm on Friday. Pradeep Kumar, a native of Delhi's Trilokpuri, was posted at the traffic circle in Uttar Pradesh's Ghaziabad. "Kumar was riding his Hero Splendor motorcycle towards National Highway 24 from Anand Vihar ISBT when the accident occurred. He died on the spot," a senior police officer said. Preliminary investigation suggests the accident was a hit-and-run. A fragment of a yellow (commercial vehicle) number plate was recovered from the spot. —*PTI*

Woman booked for abetting husband's suicide in Gujarat

BOTAD, 4 JAN

Gujarat police have registered a case against a woman for allegedly abetting her husband's suicide after he left behind a video asking his family to teach her a lesson for causing his death, police said on Saturday. According to the police, Suresh Sathadiya, 39, was found hanging from the ceiling of his house at Zamrala village in Botad district on 30 December. His family members found a video recording on Sathadiya's mobile phone, in which he has urged them to "teach his wife a lesson for causing his death", an official from Botad rural police station said. The complainant has alleged his daughter-in-law mentally harassed his son by frequently quarrelling with him and going to her parents' place every now and then. —*PTI*

5 minors among 7 nabbed in Delhi student's murder

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

The Delhi Police has nabbed seven people, including five juveniles, in connection with the murder of a 14-year-old school student in east Delhi, an official said on Saturday. The suspects were planning to flee Delhi when they were nabbed. The police also recovered the knife used in the murder and other critical evidence. The Class 9 student was attacked outside a school in east Delhi's Shakarpur area on Friday. "Investigations revealed that during a break at 4 pm, a classmate of the victim allegedly borrowed a mobile phone and made a call. The accused classmate allegedly discussed a dispute with the victim and instructed the person on the line to 'send people'," Abhishek Dhania said. Among those apprehended were five juveniles and two adults -- college student Saarthi, 19, and dairy shop owner Aman, 31. —*PTI*

Vaishnaw: Data rules balance innovation & citizen rights

Final rules to be tabled in Parliament's monsoon session

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

The draft protection rules released by the government create a balance between regulation and innovation while completely protecting citizen rights, Union minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Saturday.

The government issued draft rules for the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act on Friday for public consultation till 18 February.

The minister said earlier there was only one template available to the world -- the European data protection rule with a high level of regulation. However, Indian rules have attempted to balance the regulation with innovation to safeguard the boom in the innovation ecosystem developing among startups in the country.

He said extensive consultations have been held with the industry and systems such as

Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw PHOTO: PTI

complaint registration, their handling and distribution, interaction with digital platforms, have been put in place.

The minister said the final rules will be placed before Parliament in the monsoon session for approval and all entities handling data digitally will get two years to calibrate their systems as per the law.

The DPDP draft rules specify that a parent's verifiable consent will have to be obtained by social media or online platforms before children can create any account.

Further, parents' identity and age will also have to be validated and verified through voluntarily provided identity proof "issued by an entity entrusted by law or the government", as per the draft rules.

The draft DPDP rules which moot parents' verifiable consent to create a child's user account on social media platforms, and adds localisation requirement for certain types of personal data has significant ramifications for big tech firms, experts say noting that businesses may also face "complex challenges" in managing consent which is core to data protection norms.

According to Deloitte India, maintaining consent artefacts and offering the option to withdraw consent for specific purposes would necessitate changes level of applications and platforms. —*PTI*

COLDWAVE GRIPS NORTH

Dense fog hits Delhi airport, disrupts 419 flights

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

A thick layer of fog engulfed Delhi and parts of Haryana Punjab and Kashmir with visibility reaching the zero-level in many places, triggering either delay or cancellation of flights at airports in these states.

As many as 19 flights were diverted at the Delhi airport early Saturday morning and more than 400 flights delayed as low visibility due to dense fog impacted operations for the second straight day.

"While landing and takeoffs continue at Delhi Airport, flights that are not CAT III compliant may get affected. Passengers are requested to contact the airline concerned for updated flight information. Any inconvenience caused is deeply regretted," the Delhi International Airport Ltd (DIAL) posted on X at 6.56 am.

Thick fog covered parts of Kashmir on Saturday as the valley braced for widespread snowfall, with the possibility of heavy snow over the middle and the higher reaches, officials said.

Poor visibility hit flight operations at the Srinagar airport. Several flights were delayed but operations resumed with the visibility improving by 11am, the officials said.

Met office said a moderate to strong western disturbance was likely to affect Jammu and Kashmir and light to moderate snow at most places was possible.

Large parts of Punjab and Haryana have also been experiencing thick fog for the past few days and on Saturday, visibility dropped to zero at many places including Amritsar, Ludhiana, Patiala, IMD said. —*PTI*

6 workers killed in explosion at TN firecrackers unit

VIRUDHUNAGAR, 4 JAN

Six workers were killed following an explosion at a firecrackers manufacturing unit near here on Saturday, an official said.

The blast occurred in the morning when the workers were engaged in mixing chemical-raw materials, as part of the manufacturing process, leading to the deaths of 6 men and 4 rooms in the factory premises were flattened in the impact.

A worker, Mohammed Sudeen was injured and he was rushed to a government facility in nearby Madurai. Police have registered a case and are investigating.

The deceased were identified as S Sivakumar, 56, S Meenakshi Sundaram, 46, R Nagaraj, 37, and G Velmurugan, S Kamaraj and R Kannan, all the three were aged 54.

The blast occurred in the morning when the workers were engaged in mixing chemical-raw materials PHOTO: PTI

Chief Minister M K Stalin, expressing shock and grief over the deaths, said that he has directed officials to ensure special care for the injured worker at the Madurai government hospital.

Conveying his condolences to the bereaved families, he said he has ordered authorities to release from CM's Public Relief Fund, Rs 4 lakh each to the families of 6 victims. Also, he has ordered Rs 1 lakh to injured worker. —*PTI*

Scribe who reported on road project corruption in Chhattisgarh murdered, 3 detained

BIJAPUR, 4 JAN

Three persons have been detained in connection with the murder of a 33-year-old journalist whose body was found in a septic tank on a local contractor's property in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district, police said on Saturday.

Freelance journalist **Mukesh Chandrakar** went missing on Wednesday and his body was found on Friday in the septic tank on a property owned by contractor Suresh Chandrakar at Chattanpara Basti in Bijapur town.

"Three persons have been detained in connection with the murder and are being interrogated," a police official said, refusing to disclose the suspects' names.

Mukesh worked as a freelance journalist for news channels, including NDTV,

- Freelance journalist Mukesh Chandrakar went missing on Wednesday and his body was found on Friday in the septic tank on a property owned by contractor Suresh Chandrakar

and ran a YouTube channel by the name Bastar Junction, which has some 1.59 lakh subscribers.

The journalist had played a crucial role in the release of a CoBRA commando Rakeshwar Singh Manhas from Maoists' captivity in April 2021. The commando was taken captive in the Takalguda Naxal ambush in Bijapur, wherein 22 security personnel were martyred.

Mukesh went missing on

PHOTO: ANI

Wednesday evening, and his elder brother Yukesh Chandrakar lodged a complaint with the police the next day, a senior police official said.

Tracking Mukesh's mobile number, police reached the property owned by Suresh Chandrakar and found the body in a septic tank, which was covered with a cast concrete slab, he said. —*PTI*

An Army vehicle skidded off the road and fell into a gorge near SK Payen in the north Kashmir district PHOTO: PTI

J&K: 4 soldiers killed as vehicle falls into gorge

SRINAGAR, 4 JAN

Four army personnel died and another was injured when their vehicle skidded off the road and fell into a gorge due to inclement weather and poor visibility in Jammu and Kashmir's Bandipora district on Saturday, the second such tragedy in less than two weeks.

The accident occurred near SK Payen in the north Kashmir district where the soldiers were on duty, officials said.

The Army said that "while performing duty in Bandipora District, a vehicle of Indian Army skid and fell into the gorge due to inclement weather and poor visibility conditions". —*PTI*

Union carbide waste disposal: Mob pelts stones at incineration unit

DHAR, 4 JAN

A mob on Saturday pelted stones at the firm in Pithampur in Madhya Pradesh's Dhar district where 337 tonnes of Union Carbide waste linked to the Bhopal gas tragedy is proposed to be incinerated, a police official said.

A mob of 100-150 persons pelted stones at the gate of the unit, Pithampur police station inspector Om Prakash Ahir told PTI.

On Friday, a mob of 500-600 persons had marched to Ramky Group's Industrial Waste Management Private Limited premises, where the waste is set to be incinerated, but police managed to disperse them in time.

Hours later, the district administration had clamped prohibitory orders under section 163 of Bharatiya Nagarik Surakhsa Sanhita (BNSS) around the premises of the unit.

It will be in force till 12 January and has been invoked to avoid loss of life and property, display of arms, celebratory firing and maintaining peace around the incineration facility, the order issued by district authorities on Friday evening read.

The now-closed Union Carbide factory, which was the site of the toxic gas leak that caused the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy PHOTO: PTI

Meanwhile, Madhya Pradesh police have registered five cases against protesters at Pithampur in Dhar district who opposed the planned disposal of 337 tonnes of toxic waste linked to the Bhopal gas tragedy in their town, an official said on Saturday. —*PTI*

59 gun licences suspended in MP for power bill default

MORENA, 4 JAN

The administration in Madhya Pradesh's Morena district has suspended the gun licences of 59 people for defaulting their electricity bills, an official said on Saturday.

According to the administration, the defaulters created pressure by brandishing their guns when officials approached them for payment of dues.

"Gun licences of 59 persons have been suspended. We have been repeatedly getting information from the department (state-run power company) that when teams visit these people, they create pressure by showing their firearms," Collector Ankit Asthana told PTI.

Asthana said the administration will continue its action against defaulters.

Morena is the headquarters of the Chambal division. —*PTI*

Bihar PSC retest held at 22 Patna centres amid security

PATNA, 4 JAN

The retest for a select group of candidates who had appeared in the recent Bihar PSC exam, which has been embroiled over allegations of question paper leak, was held on Saturday afternoon at 22 centres in the Bihar capital, officials said.

Altogether, 12,000 candidates were scheduled to sit for the re-examination that started at 12pm and continued till 2pm, they said.

The 70th Combined Competitive Examination held on 13 December has been in the eye of a storm over allegations of question paper leak.

The Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) denied the allegations but ordered a fresh test for 12,000 candidates who had appeared for the exam at the Bapu Pariksha

PHOTO: ANI

Parisar in Patna.

"The re-exam took place at 22 centres in Patna. Out of a total 12,000 candidates, around 8,200 aspirants had downloaded their admit cards. The authorities concerned will later provide the exact number of students who appeared for the retest," District Magistrate Chandrashekhar Singh said.

"The retest was peacefully held at all the centres, where adequate arrangements were put in place. The district administration had issued strict guidelines. —*PTI*

1936-2024

R Chidambaram: India's atomic mastermind

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

Rajagopala Chidambaram, the architect of India's nuclear weapons programme who played a key role in the atomic tests at Pokhran in 1974 and 1998, passed away in Mumbai on Saturday morning. He was 88.

A world-class physicist and an astute science administrator, Chidambaram made legendary contributions to the field of nuclear physics, besides introducing innovative technologies to empower communities in rural India.

Chidambaram joined the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) in 1962 and rose to become its director in 1990.

In 1993, he helmed the country's nuclear programme as chairman of the Atomic

PHOTO: PTI

Energy Commission and as secretary in the Department of Atomic Energy, a post he held till 2000.

Post retirement, he was appointed as the principal scientific advisor (PSA) to the Government of India in 2001, a post he held till 2018.

He also served as chairman

- Chidambaram will be best known for his contributions to India's nuclear weapons programme with which he had been associated since 1967

of the board of governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) (1994-1995).

As PSA, Chidambaram steered India's forays in the fields of nano-electronics, implemented the National Knowledge Network, and set up Rural Technology Action Groups (RuTAG) to find rural applications for advanced technologies.

He also championed initiatives in areas such as energy, healthcare and strategic self-reliance, and steered numerous projects that significantly advanced India's science and technology landscape.

Chidambaram will be best known for his contributions to India's nuclear weapons programme with which he had been associated since 1967, when peaceful nuclear explosion technology was much talked about globally.

He represented India at various global conferences organised by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Born on 12 November, 1936, in Chennai, Chidambaram did his initial schooling at the Sanatan Dharam High School in Meerut. From eighth standard onwards, he studied at the PS High School at Mylapore in Chennai and graduated from the Presidency College. —*PTI*

MAHA KUMBH MELA 2025

Sadhus take part in a procession on Saturday in Prayagraj, ahead of the Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, one of Hinduism's most significant festivals. Held every 12 years, the event takes place at the Triveni Sangam in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, where the sacred rivers Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati converge. The Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 is set to begin on 13 January with the Paush Purnima Snan and will conclude on 26 February
PHOTO: PTI

India's $1B drug busts unveil alarming trends

In the biggest-ever drugs bust in New Delhi, officials confiscated over 560 kilos of cocaine and some 40 kilos of hydroponic marijuana in October last year. The seized substances were valued at approximately USD669 million and led to multiple arrests of smugglers and dealers linked to an international drug syndicate.

Within days, police seized another 208 kilos of cocaine hidden in packs of chips and other food items in a rented shop

In the same month, a joint operation between Delhi and Gujarat state police departments resulted in the confiscation of 518 kilos of cocaine from a pharmaceutical company in Gujarat, valued at around USD595 million. This was part of a larger investigation that uncovered a narcotics syndicate.

"That India has always been a hub of (drugs) smuggling is a known fact, but the number of (smuggling) routes have increased and the methods of trafficking have become more sophisticated of late," Romesh Bhattacharjee, a former narcotics commissioner, told DW.

"While precise statistics are difficult to confirm, it is estimated that for every kilogram of drugs seized, up to 10 kilograms or more may remain unseized," added Bhattacharjee. The total value of drugs found in 2024 reached USD1.07 , according to estimates by various security agencies. But experts say that may be just the tip of the iceberg. G Shreekumar Menon, a former director general of the National Academy of Customs, Indirect Taxes and Narcotics, said the situation paints an alarming picture of the volume of drugs entering India.

According to the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), cocaine smuggling through air routes has become a dominant method of trafficking the expensive drug.

"Smugglers often hide drugs in luggage, courier packages, or have them ingested by human carriers. Alongside cocaine, there is an uptick in methamphetamine smuggling, particularly in northeastern states like Assam and Mizoram," reads a DRI report.

According to the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, cocaine smuggling through air routes has become a dominant method of trafficking the expensive drug
PHOTO: PTI

A particularly alarming trend highlighted in the report is the emergence of "black cocaine," a new form of drug that is difficult to detect by authorities.

Black cocaine is chemically masked with substances like charcoal or iron oxide, creating a black powder that can evade drug-sniffing methods.

"We are being challenged by increasingly sophisticated smuggling methods, shifting global trade patterns, and the misuse of emerging technologies," a DRI official said.

"There is a noticeable increase in cocaine consumption by Gen Z, prompted by increased purchasing power," said Menon.

In 2018, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment estimated that there were 23 million opioid users in India, marking a 600% increase since 2004. But that figure has taken a quantum leap since then, according to government agencies and experts. Heroin, crystal meth, synthetic drugs, and hydroponic marijuana are increasingly being used by the youth, fueling a growing domestic demand.

A report submitted to the Indian parliament in 2023 revealed alarming numbers related to drug abuse in Punjab state, pointing to growing addiction among children. It found more than 6.6 million drug users in Punjab, with nearly 6,97,000 children between 10-17 years of age. Among these, 343,000 children consume opioid drugs (including heroin), 18,100 cocaine, and around 72,000 use other substances. The UN anti-drug agency UNODC cites India as a major hub of illicit shipments of precursor drugs destined for meth labs internationally, including both neighboring countries like Myanmar and far off destinations in Central America and Africa. For instance, Greater Noida, has unexpectedly emerged as a hotspot for a string of drug busts involving foreigners running meth labs.

In late 2024, the Narcotics Control Bureau and Delhi Police uncovered a clandestine meth lab in Greater Noida, linked to a Mexican drug cartel.

Approximately 95kg of methamphetamine was seized, along with various precursor chemicals and manufacturing equipment.

In April 2024, security officials arrested four Nigerian nationals and took hold of over 26 kilos of illicit drugs.

"The presence of an active pharmaceutical industry significantly increases the likelihood of illegal methamphetamine labs, primarily due to the availability of precursor chemicals like ephedrine and pseudoephedrine," AP Kala, a former DRI director general, told DW. *—DW News*

SALAR

2 hours of weekly exercise boosts heart health

There's no question that exercise is good for the heart. Regular exercise lowers blood pressure and cholesterol and reduces the chances of having a heart attack or stroke.

But sometimes it can be hard to find the time (and motivation) to exercise. So, what's the least amount of exercise you can get away with doing while still seeing these benefits? That answer depends on how fit you are to begin with.

So, if you're someone who's completely sedentary, then only a small amount of exercise is needed to see a reduction in cardiac risk. From a starting point of virtually zero exercise, an hour or two a week of leisurely cycling or brisk walking might be all you need to reduce your risk of death from cardiovascular disease by as much as 20 per cent.

But as you get fitter and increase the amount you exercise, the cardiovascular health gains diminish and eventually plateau. This is sometimes referred to as a J-shaped curve.

A sedentary person who goes from doing nothing to exercising a couple of hours a week will see the greatest reductions in cardiovascular risk during this period. If they increase the amount they exercise to four hours a week, there would be additional – albeit smaller – reductions in risk (around 10 per cent). But the benefits to cardiovascular health appear to max out after 4-6 hours a week – with no additional gains beyond this point for everyone.

However, one study in which sedentary people were trained to complete an endurance event, such as a marathon, found that once participants reached 7-9 hours a week of training, they saw noticeable changes in their heart's structure.

Training at this level gives the same reductions in cardiovascular risk as training 4-6 hours a week. But participants had an increase in their amount of heart muscle, as well as dilation of their cardiac chambers. The heart is like any other muscle: if trained enough, it will get bigger. These changes occurred as early as three months after starting.

So, while the additional hours of exercise don't further benefit cardiovascular disease risk, these changes in the heart's structure will mean improvements in fitness – and hopefully, running a faster marathon.

These sorts of changes were previously only thought possible in elite athletes – but this study is proof that if we're willing to commit, we can not only get the cardiovascular benefits but also develop the heart of an athlete.

After you start doing an hour or two of exercise a week to improve your heart health, something incredible and unexpected might happen. You might actually enjoy it. Four hours a week is the sweet spot that gives the greatest reduction in cardiovascular risk – but if you enjoy training or find a sport you love, you shouldn't let this stop you doing more.

The idea of going from never exercising to working out four hours a week can be daunting – especially if you don't have much spare time. This is where the intensity of your workouts is important.

If you want the biggest bang for your buck in terms of reducing cardiovascular risk, you need to break a sweat. High-intensity interval training (HIIT) is one time-efficient way of maximising your returns from exercise. It's typically a 20-minute workout comprising short, 30- to 60-second bursts of intense exercise followed by a brief rest in between.

Despite how short these workouts are, their intensity means that after several weeks of HIIT, you'll probably see many benefits – including reductions in blood pressure and cholesterol. However, most HIIT studies have been too small to measure if there's an effect on overall cardiovascular risk.

A word of caution is needed if you have cardiovascular disease. There are several conditions – such as cardiomyopathy (genetic heart muscle disease), ischemic heart disease (narrowing of heart arteries) and myocarditis (heart inflammation, usually viral) – where strenuous exercise is advised against. People with these health conditions should stick to low- or moderate-intensity exercise. This will still be beneficial for your heart, while not putting you at risk of harm.

If finding time to exercise in the week is a challenge and you're only able to work out at weekends, rest assured this is still beneficial. One retrospective study of over 37,000 people found those who did their week's worth of physical activity over just 1-2 days had the same reduction in cardiovascular disease risk as those who did activity spread throughout the week. So, for a self-professed lazy person who wants to improve their cardiovascular health, the message is simple: even a small amount of any type of exercise can make a big difference. *—Courtesy, The Conversation*

Regular exercise lowers blood pressure and cholesterol and reduces the chances of having a heart attack or stroke
PHOTO: AI

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Canada's fight with Donald Trump isn't just economic, it's existential

United States president-elect Donald Trump has reiterated his apparent desire to make Canada a 51st American state, sharing a recent social media post about Canadian entrepreneur Kevin O'Leary's support of the idea.

Trump was roundly mocked for his latest trolling of Canada, but his apparent fixation is dangerous at a time when the country's Liberal government, long weakened, is in disarray following the shock resignation of Chrystia Freeland as finance minister and deputy prime minister.

In fact, in her December resignation letter, Freeland placed the country's response to Trump at the heart of her critique of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

Among the many broadsides delivered to her former boss, the fact that Canada is ill-prepared to face the dire new threat of Trump's second term was a recurring theme.

Trump wasted no time inserting himself into Canada's internal affairs, calling Freeland "toxic" and continuing his running gag of referring to Trudeau as the governor of an American state rather than the leader of a sovereign nation.

The attacks are becoming routine, with Trump suggesting in another post that Canadians would "save massively on taxes and military protection" as the 51st state.

Whoever becomes prime minister in the weeks or months to come will have to figure out how to deal with Trump — and the existential threat he poses to Canada — in a much more effective manner than the Liberals have under Trudeau. Trump is flagrantly disrespecting Canadian independence and, along with it, Canadian identity. He's openly challenging the very idea of Canadian sovereignty. Canada must respond accordingly.

It can be hard to fully understand the nature and the extent of threats posed by someone so willing to flaunt respected political and diplomatic conventions. His annexation threats create a constant set of multifaceted challenges to Canada's economic prosperity, democratic norms and sovereignty.

Trump's proposed 25 per cent tariffs on all Canadian exports to the US are going to be incredibly costly to both countries, given the integration of their economies. But given the size disparity between the two countries, the impact will be bigger in Canada.

The democratic threat is also clear. Trump has shown he regards democracy not as a crucial set of rules and norms, but as a set of obstacles to overcome. His revenge tour has begun, with lawsuits against media outlets and even against a pollster whose data suggested Democrat Kamala Harris was pulling ahead during the late days of the US election campaign.

In the face of US president-elect Donald Trump's tariff threats, Canadian PM Justin Trudeau made a surprise visit in November to pay his respects to Trump and advocate for Canada's interests
PHOTO: WIKIMEDIACOMMONS

Once back in the White House, Trump has promised to use public institutions to punish opponents. A partisan U.S. Supreme Court decision last year ensures that even if his own actions are criminal, he will remain immune from prosecution.

Trump's disrespect of democratic institutions is corrosive and contagious. During his first term, experts sounded alarm bells about how he was linked to democratic decline around the world. If the U.S. president can openly challenge democratic norms, after all, what's to stop other would-be demagogues from doing the same?

A second Trump administration is likely to continue such trends, and his willingness to intervene in Canadian politics is already causing shock waves north of the border.

He's made it a running joke that Canada is not a real country, but just another American state. Nervously laughing off this threat doesn't cut it as a response.

Canada has so far acted in a manner that makes it seem as though Trump has a point. Rather than pushing back by defending Canada's strong record in managing its part of the border relationship, the government immediately promised more than $1 billion in new border spending. Canada's leaders have failed to call out Trump's threats as the bluster of a bully.

In the face of Trump's tariff threats, Trudeau made a surprise trip to Florida to pay his respects to the president-elect and plead Canada's case, rather than observing the normal protocol and waiting for a formal post-inauguration state visit. This made Trudeau appear more like a supplicant than a visiting head of government.

It's helpful in this situation to think of Trump as a schoolyard bully demanding someone else do his homework — in this case, defend America's borders. Such bullying doesn't end when you give in to the bully, but only when it becomes clear you won't.

Border protection is a core function of any state, and a responsibility of any American president. Trump's demand that others do it for him is both a sign of weakness and an attempt to create a scapegoat should his efforts fail.

For more than a century, Canada and the US have found ways to co-operate and prosper side by side despite the fact that the US is a much more powerful nation. They've built alliances and agreements founded on shared norms, values and customs as part of a deep and multifaceted relationship.

None of that history seems to matter to Trump, and now American power seemingly matters more than Canadian sovereignty. This power imbalance is all the more acute given Canada's dependence on the American economy and American military might.

Shutting off power exports, as Ontario Premier Doug Ford suggests, is one course of action that would have an immediate and significant detrimental effect on the American economy. Ditto for petroleum. Energy is power in more ways than one.

The US consumes millions of barrels of Canadian petroleum every day, and a tax on that fuel would be inflationary and ultimately unpopular with American voters.

—Courtesy, The Conversation

Soldier who blew up Tesla left note saying 'US headed for collapse'

Letter claims Americans only focus on fireworks and violence

LAS VEGAS, 4 JAN

A highly decorated Army soldier who fatally shot himself in a Tesla Cybertruck just before it blew up out-side the Trump hotel in Las Vegas left notes saying the New Year's Day explosion was a stunt to serve as a "wake up call" for the country's ills, investigators said Friday.

Matthew Livelsberger, a 37-year-old Green Beret from Colorado Springs, Colorado, also wrote in notes he left on his cellphone that he needed to "cleanse" his mind "of the brothers I've lost and relieve myself of the burden of the lives I took." Livelsberger served in the Army since 2006 and deployed twice to Af-ghanistan.

"This was not a terrorist attack, it was a wake up call. Americans only pay attention to spectacles and violence. What better way to get my point across than a stunt with fireworks and explosives," Livels-berger wrote in one letter found by authorities and released Friday.

The explosion caused minor injuries to seven people but virtually no damage to the Trump International Hotel. Authorities said that Livelsberger acted alone.

Livelsberger's letters covered a range of topics including political grievances, societal problems and both domestic and international issues, including the war in Ukraine. He said in one letter that the US was "terminally ill and headed toward collapse."

Tesla engineers, meanwhile, helped extract data from the Cybertruck for investigators, including Livels-berger's path between charging stations from Colorado through New Mexico and Arizona and on to Las Vegas, according to Assistant Sheriff Dori Koren.

The new details came as investigators were still trying to determine whether Livelsberger sought to make a political point with the Tesla and the hotel bearing the president-elect's name.

Livelsberger harbored no ill will toward President-elect Donald Trump, law enforcement officials said. In one of the notes he left, he said the country needed to "rally around" Trump and Tesla CEO Elon Musk. *—PTI*

The Cybertruck explosion caused minor injuries to seven people; Matthew Livelsberger (inset) **PHOTOS: /SCREENGRABX**

4 INJURED IN DC SHOOTING NEAR METRO STATION

WASHINGTON DC, 4 JAN

A shooting in Washington DC left four people injured on Thursday night near the Noma-Gallaudet U Met-ro station. The victims, three men and one woman, were all reported to be stable and 'conscious and breathing.' Two were hospitalised by emergency services, while the others sought medical care inde-pendently. Authorities are investigating the incident but have not identified suspects or motives. This follows a Wednesday shooting in New York, where ten people were injured outside a nightclub hosting a memorial event. *—Agencies*

UK minister rebukes Musk over child scandals remarks

LONDON, 4 JAN

A senior British politician has rejected Elon Musk's criticism of the government's handling of historic child grooming scandals.

Musk accused Prime Minister Keir Starmer of failing to bring "rape gangs" to justice when he was direc-tor of public prosecutions more than a decade ago.

In a flurry of posts on X , Musk also suggested that safeguarding minister Jess Phillips "deserves to be in prison" for refusing a request for a national public inquiry into the Oldham scandal.

British Health Secretary Wes Streeting said Musk's views were "misjudged and certainly misinformed". He urged Musk, a close confidant of US President-elect Donald Trump, to work with the government on tackling the issue of child sexual exploitation.

The abuse of girls, which emerged more than a decade ago in several English towns and cities, has long stirred controversy.Musk appears to be taking a keen interest in the United Kingdom's political scene since the left-of-centre Labour Party won a landslide election victory in July 2024. *—Agencies*

Blinken off to Asia, Europe on last trip as top US diplomat

WASHINGTON, 4 JAN

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will embark on what is expected to be his final overseas trip in office this weekend, travelling to South Korea, Japan and France. The State Department announced Friday that Blinken would visit Seoul, Tokyo and Paris beginning Sunday. He will return to Washington early Thursday in time to attend the funeral services for former president Jimmy Carter, officials said. In South Korea, which is in the midst of a political turmoil following the impeachment of President Yoon Suk Yeol, and Japan, Blinken intends to highlight the expansion of US cooperation with both nations as part of the Biden administration's Indo-Pacific strategy. That strategy is primarily intended to blunt Chinese ambitions in the region. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

World's oldest person, Itooka, dies at 116 in Japan

TOKYO, 4 JAN

Tomiko Itooka, recognised by Guinness World Records as the world's oldest person, has died at the age of 116, a local official in Ashiya reported. Itooka passed away on 29 December in Hyogo Prefecture. Born on 23 May, 1908, in Osaka, Itooka gained the title of the oldest living person last year following the death of 117-year-old Maria Branyas. A former volleyball player, Itooka was noted for her vibrant spirit and had the impressive feat of climbing Mount Ontake twice. After managing her husband's textile factory during World War II, she lived independently following his death in 1979. She is survived by one son, one daugh-ter, five grandchildren. The new title now goes to 116-year-old Brazilian nun Inah Canabarro Lucas. *—PTI*

Hundreds of animals die in US shopping mall fire

DALLAS, 4 JAN

A fire that broke out at a shopping centre in Dallas on Friday morning killed more than 500 animals, most of which were small birds, authorities said. The 579 animals in the pet shop at Plaza Latina in Northwest Dallas died from smoke inhalation, Dallas Fire-Rescue spokesperson Jason Evans said in a statement. The flames from the fire never reached the animals. Chickens, hamsters, two dogs and two cats also died, Evans said. Two-alarm fire took about two hours and as many as 45 firefighters to extinguish around 11 am, Evans said. No people were injured in the fire. The structure of the large, one-story shopping centre was damaged, including a collapsed roof. *PTI*

Taiwan says China trying to destabilise democracy

TAIPEI, 4 JAN

Taiwan's government has accused China of intensifying efforts to undermine confidence in the island's democracy and its close ties to the United States through an extensive disinformation campaign, particu-larly online. The National Security Bureau reported a staggering 60 per cent increase in false or biased information disseminated by China last year, rising from 1.33 million to 2.16 million instances. Major platforms for this misinformation include Facebook and X, alongside youth-targeted platforms like TikTok. The report detailed the use of "inauthentic accounts" to propagate pro-China propaganda, with AI being employed to create fake videos. China, which claims Taiwan as its territory, continues to exert influence over Taiwanese media. *—PTI*

Both the Indonesian and al-Awda Hospitals have been damaged due to repeated Israeli attacks since October 2023 **PHOTO: PTI**

Israel orders evacuation of Gaza's hospitals

JERUSALEM, 4 JAN

Israeli forces on Saturday have ordered the immediate evacuation of staff and patients from two of northern Gaza's most critical hospitals, as the United Nations pleaded with Israel to halt its attacks on medical facilities in the besieged territory.

On Friday, Israeli soldiers surrounded the Indonesian Hospital in Beit Lahiya, where many displaced Pal-estinians have sought shelter.

Both the Indonesian and al-Awda Hospitals have been damaged due to repeated Israeli attacks since October 2023.

Israel has defended its raids by saying they are being used by Palestinian armed groups, but the UN has frequently questioned the veracity of the claims. On Friday, Israel's UN ambassador in Geneva, Daniel Meron said that the raid on Kamal Adwan Hospital a week ago was "triggered by irrefutable evidence" that Palestinian armed groups were using the hospital.

He said Israeli forces had taken "extraordinary measures to protect civilian life while acting on credible intelligence". Israel's targeting of medical facilities in Gaza prompted the UN Security Council to hold an emergency meeting on Friday, during which UN officials pleaded for the protection of the hospitals. *—Agencies*

US POLITICS

Trump's sentencing set for 10 Jan; jail unlikely

NEW YORK, 4 JAN

A New York judge on Friday upheld President-elect Donald Trump's conviction in his hush money criminal case and scheduled his sentencing for 10 January.

New York Supreme Court Justice Juan Merchan said Trump, who is 78, may appear at his sentencing in person or virtually.

Trump was found guilty of 34 counts of falsifying business records to conceal a hush money payment his ex-fixer made to an adult film star ahead of the 2016 election.

Trump lambasted the ruling in posts to Truth Social, calling it an "illegitimate political attack."

Trump's attorneys have fought to have the case dismissed in light of Trump's re-election in November.

Merchan said throwing out the jury verdict would "undermine the Rule of Law in immeasurable ways." Merchan wrote that he was not inclined to sentence Trump and that a sentence of "unconditional discharge," would be "the most viable solution."

Trump spokesman Steven Cheung called it a "direct violation of the Supreme Court's Immunity decision and other longstanding jurisprudence."

Trump's attorneys have argued in separate cases that Trump was protected by presidential immunity while he was in office. *—Agencies*

Donald Trump **PHOTO: X**

Mike Johnson re-elected as House Speaker

WASHINGTON, 4 JAN

Republican Mike Johnson has been re-elected as Speaker of the House on the first ballot Friday, over-coming dissent from hardline members of his party, buoyed by support from President-elect Donald Trump.

As the new Congress convened, a faction of hard-right Republicans huddled in the House chamber, some declining to vote for Johnson or choosing an alternative. This discord signals potential challenges for the GOP as it assumes unified control over Washington.

Johnson managed to win over two remaining holdouts, eliciting applause from Republican members. However, his ongoing struggle to maintain party unity raises concerns about the viability of Trump's ambitious agenda, which includes proposed tax cuts and mass deportations.

Johnson was nominated by GOP Conference Chair Rep. Lisa McClain, R-Mich., who acknowledged the difficulties of achieving consensus among party members.

In contrast, House Democrats put forth their leader, Hakeem Jeffries who has been presented as a figure of stability amid legislative chaos. Johnson, despite internal party opposition, arrived with confidence, having worked late into the night to secure support. *—PTI*

Mike Johnson **PHOTO: X**

119th US Congress welcomes four Hindu lawmakers

WASHINGTON DC, 4 JAN

The 119th US Congress, which formally started on Friday, includes four Hindu lawmakers, marking the largest representation of this religious minority to date.

The four Indian Americans who belong to the Hindu faith are Suhash Subramaniam, Raja Krishnamoorthi, Ro Khanna, and Shri Thanedar.

Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal, the only Indian American woman to be ever elected to the House of Representatives, has mentioned her religion as "unspecified". Dr Ami Bera, the seniormost of the six Indian American lawmakers, has identified himself as a Unitarian. While Christianity remains the dominant religion, Jews at six per cent constitute the second largest religious group. The current Congress has 31 Jews. *—PTI*

S Korea: Fatal crash cockpit transcript nearly complete

SEOUL, 4 JAN

South Korean investigators are probing the tragic crash of Jeju Air flight 2216, which occurred on 29 De-cember, 2024, during its journey from Thailand to South Korea. The Boeing 737-800 was carrying 181 passengers when it belly-landed at Muan International Airport, striking a barrier and igniting in flames. In the aftermath, only two individuals on board survived.

Authorities are currently working to transcribe the cockpit voice recorder (CVR) audio, with expectations of completing the transcript today. The flight data recorder (FDR) is also being prepared for transport to the United States for further analysis, as officials seek to uncover the events leading to the disastrous landing. Though the exact cause of the crash remains uncertain, investigators are considering several factors, including a potential bird strike, malfunctioning landing gear, and issues related to the runway barrier. This week, examination of the crash site in South Jeolla Province has led to the recovery of one of the aircraft's engines, with plans to retrieve the second engine soon. Chief executive of Jeju Air, has been barred from leaving the country. As the nation mourns the victims of this tragedy, efforts to establish a clear understanding of the incident continue. *—DW News*

PHOTO: X

Customs raid at Bezos' $500M yatch

ST. BARTS, 4 JAN

Jeff Bezos' USD 500 million luxury yacht, Koru, underwent a surprise customs inspection while sailing near St. Barts, a renowned celebrity hotspot. The inspection took place during a sunbathing session by Lauren Sánchez, a former TV reporter and Bezos' fiancée.

The inspection, which lasted around three hours, was described by officials as a routine proce-dure. At the time, Bezos was not aboard the yacht, and his representative was unavailable for comment. The raid appeared to have minimal impact on the guests, aside from a brief exchange be-tween Sánchez and a stewardess regarding the visit. *—Agencies*

Myanmar frees 6,000 prisoners on Independence Day

BANGKOK, 4 JAN

Myanmar's military regime has announced the release of more than 6,000 prisoners as part of a mass amnesty to mark the 77th anniversary of the country's independence from Britain on Saturday. However, only a small fraction of those released were political detainees imprisoned for opposing military rule since the February 2021 coup that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

State-run MRTV reported that Senior General Min Aung Hlaing granted amnesty to 5,864 prisoners and 180 foreigners, who are set to be deported. Notably, those freed include approximately 600 individuals charged under Section 505(A) of Myanmar's penal code, which prohibits spreading unrest or false news. Among them was Khet Aung, a former chief minister sentenced to 12 years on corruption charges.

Life sentences for 144 inmates were commuted to 15 years, and many others received a one-sixth reduction in their sentences, though exceptions were made for those convicted under laws frequently used against military opponents.

The amnesty came amidst ongoing armed resistance to military rule. *—PTI*

Released prisoners are welcomed by family after they left Insein Prison on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

FIRE AT FOOD MARKET IN CHINA KILLS AT LEAST 8

BEIJING, 4 JAN

A fire at a food market Saturday in northern China killed at least eight people and injured 15 others, state media said.

The fire at the Liguang market in the city of Zhangjiakou broke out midday Saturday and was mostly ex-tinguished by 2.00 pm (0600 GMT), Xinhua News Agency reported, citing a government official in Qiaoxi District where the market is located. Such traditional markets are often tightly packed with shoppers seeking prices lower than at supermar-ket chains. Fire sources can range from gas bottles to charcoal used to roast meat and discarded cigarettes while aging infrastructure, has also been blamed for fires and explosions. *—PTI*

AGAINST IMMIGRATION

Canada halts PR applications for parents and grandparents

OTTAWA, 4 JAN

The Canadian government has temporarily stopped accepting new permanent residency (PR) applications for parents and grandparents under the Family Class stream. This indefinite suspension, announced in the Canada Gazette on Friday, will remain until further instructions from Immigration Minister Marc Miller.

According to the Gazette, no new PR or sponsorship applications for parents and grandparents will be accepted starting 1 January, 2025. The Department of Citizenship and Immigration will process only applications submitted in 2024. A cap of 15,000 sponsorship applications has been set for the year. "Unless subsequent instructions are issued for 2025, no applications under this category will be processed," the notification stated. Meanwhile, parents and grandparents remain eligible for the supervisa, a long-term, multiple-entry document.

In 2023, 28,313 individuals were admitted under the parent and grandparent category, a 4per cent in-crease from 2022, as per the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) annual report. For supervisas, IRCC approved 73,113 applications in 2023, with processing times reduced to 24 months compared to 36 months in 2022. Figures for 2024 applications are not yet available. The pause is aimed at managing the backlog while continuing to offer supervisa, ensuring families can reunite temporarily while permanent solutions are addressed. *—Agencies*

PHOTO: X

FPI sold ₹4,285 cr equities in first 3 days of 2025

FPIs record biggest single-day sale of ₹5,351 cr on day 1

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have started 2025 on a cautious note in Indian equities, with a net selling of Rs 4,285 crore in just the first three trading sessions of the year, according to data from the National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL).

The data further revealed that the highest selling in the equity segment occurred on the very first day of 2025, with a significant net outflow of Rs 5,351 crore. This marked the biggest single-day sell-off by foreign investors in the equity markets this year.

However, the data for the last month, December, highlighted that net investment by FPIs in Indian equities stood positive, with a net investment of Rs 15,446 crore.

The year 2024 marked a positive ending, but the net buying value in Indian equities by FPIs drastically reduced, declining to Rs 427 crore.

The country experienced a drastic drop in Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI) inflows in 2024, with net investments falling by 99 per cent compared to the previous year. One of the primary reasons for this decline was the dominance of the US economy in the global markets.

The year 2024 marked a positive ending, but the net buying value in Indian equities by FPIs drastically reduced **PHOTO: PTI**

The strong performance of the US economy, coupled with resilient stock markets and prolonged higher interest rates, directed substantial investment toward US bonds, money markets, and equities. This shift occurred at the expense of emerging markets like India.

Additionally, Indian markets lost some appeal due to higher valuations, an elevated market cap-to-GDP ratio, slowing GDP growth, weaker industrial output, and reduced corporate earnings growth.

The sharp decline in FPI inflows underscores the need for India to address both global and domestic challenges to sustain foreign investment and bolster economic growth in the coming years. *—PTI*

- The strong performance of the US economy, coupled with resilient stock markets and prolonged higher interest rates, directed substantial investment toward US bonds, money markets, and equities. This shift occurred at the expense of emerging markets like India

RBI APPROVES

HDFC to acquire 9.5% stake in AU Small Finance Bank

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has granted HDFC Bank, India's largest private lender, approval to acquire up to a 9.5 per cent stake in AU Small Finance Bank within a year of the approval date. If the acquisition is not completed within this period, the approval will expire.

In a regulatory filing, AU Small Finance Bank confirmed that the RBI's letter, dated 3 January, 2025, allows HDFC Bank and its group companies—including HDFC Mutual Fund, HDFC Life Insurance, HDFC Pension Management, HDFC ERGO General Insurance, and HDFC Securities—to collectively acquire up to 9.5 per cent of AU SFB's paid-up share capital or voting rights.

In a separate announcement, HDFC Bank also revealed it has received RBI's approval to acquire up to a 9.5 per cent aggregate stake in both Kotak Mahindra Bank and Capital Small Finance Bank, with this approval valid until 2 January, 2026.

However, the bank must ensure that the combined ownership of its group entities in these banks does not exceed the 9.5 per cent cap at any point.

While HDFC Bank does not plan to invest directly in these banks, its group companies' collective holdings could exceed the 5 percent cap. To address this, the bank sought regulatory approval to raise its investment limit. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Kirloskar challenges SEBI's disclosure letter order at SAT

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

Four Kirloskar companies on Saturday said they have filed an appeal before the Securities Appellate Tribunal challenging the SEBI letter asking them to disclose the deed of family settlement that was signed by members of the Kirloskar family on 11 September, 2009. In a joint statement, the Kirloskar companies -- Kirloskar Ferrous Industries Ltd (KFIL), Kirloskar Industries Ltd (KIL), Kirloskar Pneumatic Company Ltd, Kirloskar Oil Engines Ltd -- said they have filed the appeal before SAT challenging the SEBI letter dated December 30, 2024 wherein the market regulator advised them to disclose the Deed of Family Settlement (DDS). On 31 December, these companies stated that they were preparing to legally challenge the letter by SEBI—*PTI*

DPIIT allies with Stride Ventures to help startups

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) on Saturday said it has joined hands with venture debt firm Stride Ventures to support high growth potential startups in their funding requirements.It said this collaboration will be instrumental in creating enormous opportunities for startups by integrating financial support with strategic mentorship and market access. Highlighting the macroeconomic impact of this collaboration, Joint Secretary in DPIIT Sanjiv said Stride Ventures will curate dedicated programmes and collaborate on engagements like the Bharat Grand Challenge to promote entrepreneurship, innovation, and investment. Startups from tier-2 and tier-3 cities will receive targeted guidance, mentorship, and access to a global mentor network to support their scaling journey, it added. *—PTI*

HMSI sales up 32% at 58.01 lakh units in 2024

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India on Saturday reported a 32 per cent growth in total wholesales at 58,01,498 units in 2024 over the previous year. This included domestic sales of 52,92,976 units and 5,08,522 units exports, Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India (HMSI) said in a statement. Last month, total sales stood at 3,08,083 units, which included domestic sales of 2,70,919 units and 37,164 units exports, it added—*PTI*

'IIJS Signature to make ₹35,000 cr business this year'

MUMBAI, 4 JAN

HIndia International Jewellery Show (IIJS) Signature will be able to generate business worth Rs 30,000-35,000 crore this year, Gem & Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC) Chairman Vipul Shah said on Saturday. Speaking at the first day of IIJS Signature, he said the council is hopeful that all its 2025-26 Budget expectations will be met, including the demand for budgetary allocation for consumer education, among others. Earlier, Maharashtra Minister for Tourism and Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Mangal Prasad Lodha, along with Shah and other industry stalwarts, inaugurated one of the world's largest gem and jewellery B2B show IIJS Signature 2025 at the Jio World Convention Centre here. The same show will also be hosted at another venue Bombay Exhibition Centre, Nesco Grounds in the western Goregaon Suburb from Sunday. *—PTI*

India's CAD to stay high in FY26 amid trade policies: Report

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

A report from JM Financial has indicated that India's current account deficit (CAD) is poised to stay elevated in FY26, largely due to stringent global trade policies. The report highlights a troubling trend where imports have consistently outstripped exports, contributing to a widening trade deficit that threatens to exacerbate the CAD. In November 2024, India recorded a trade deficit of USD 37 billion, a stark increase compared to the average monthly deficit of USD 23.5 billion during April to October 2024. The realignment of global supply chains in the wake of US President-elect Donald Trump's trade policies is primarily blamed for this shift, with Indian exports likely to suffer more than imports.

The report predicts a CAD of approximately 1.5-1.6 per cent of GDP for FY25, potentially remaining high in FY26 at around 1.4-1.5 per cent depending on the trajectory of Trump's policies. This persistent deficit is expected to place pressure on the Indian rupee, potentially leading to further depreciation. On a more positive note, fiscal consolidation measures are anticipated to keep bond yields stable, with the government expected to comfortably meet its FY26 fiscal deficit target of 4.5 per cent. However, reduced capital expenditure during the election period and a shift towards lowering debt levels as a percentage of GDP have been noted. Overall, while India grapples with a widening CAD and trade imbalances, fiscal discipline and a stabilising bond market could provide some economic relief in future. *—ANI*

PHOTO: PTI

AMID BAN

Govt permits export of 2L tonne wheat to Nepal

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

The government has permitted exports of two lakh tonne of wheat to Nepal, according to a notification issued on Saturday.

The export is permitted through National Cooperative Exports Limited (NCEL), the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) said in the notification. NCEL is a company set up with cooperative societies as its promoters.

Though export of wheat is banned to maintain domestic supply, outbound shipments are allowed on the basis of permission granted by the government to certain countries to meet their food security needs and on request.

In a separate notification, DGFT said inputs imported for synthetic knitted fabrics by advance authorisation holders, EOUs (export oriented units) and SEZs (special economic zones) shall be exempted from MIP (minimum import condition).

There is a USD 3.5 per kg MIP on synthetic knitted fabrics, to discourage inbound shipments of cheap fabrics.

The export is permitted through National Cooperative Exports Limited (NCEL), according to Directorate General of Foreign Trade **PHOTO: PTI**

"Import of synthetic knitted fabrics...is restricted. However, import is free if CIF is USD 3.5 and above per kilogram. Imported by advance authorisation holders, EOUs and SEZs shall be exempted from MIP condition," it said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

BR Goyal Infra sets IPO price band at ₹128-135 per share

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

BR Goyal Infrastructure on Saturday said it has fixed a price band of Rs 128-135 per equity share for Rs 85.21 crore initial share sale, which will hit the markets on 7 January.

The initial public offering (IPO) will end on 9 January and bidding for anchor investor will open for a day on January 6, the company, which specialises in infrastructure projects, said in a statement.

At the upper end of the price band, the company is going to fetch about Rs 85.2 crore, while shares of the company will be listed on the BSE's SME platform, it added.

Indore-based B R Goyal Infra's IPO is entirely a fresh issuance of up to 63.12 lakh equity shares with a face value of Rs 10 each, according to the red herring prospectus (RHP).

The net proceeds from the public issue will be utilised for funding capital expenditure requirement and for funding the working capital requirement.

Funds from the IPO will also be used by B R Goyal Infra towards funding expenditure for inorganic growth through acquisitions and general corporate purposes, the RHP said. *—PTI*

SBI report: India's pulses and cereals consumption drops by 5%

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

A recent analysis by the State Bank of India (SBI) reveals a significant transformation in Indian household spending patterns over the last 12 years, with a marked shift from food to non-food items. The report highlights a notable decline in the consumption of cereals and pulses, which has decreased by over 5% in both rural and urban regions.

The findings indicate that the expenditure on food has fallen sharply; in rural areas, it has decreased from 52.9 per cent in 2011-12 to 47.04 per cent in 2023-24, while urban areas have seen a decline from 42.62 per cent to 39.68 per cent. Conversely, spending on non-food items has surged, with rural households increasing their non-food expenditure from 47.1 to 52.96 per cent, and urban areas rising from 57.38 per cent to 60.32 per cent .

The report attributes these changes to economic growth, government policies, and evolving lifestyle preferences.

This shift underscores evolving socio-economic landscape **PHOTO: PTI**

Notably, spending on toiletries has risen, buoyed by initiatives such as the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, which has heightened hygiene awareness. Furthermore, the share of taxes in household budgets has diminished, likely due to the rationalisation of GST rates, while expenditure on clothing and footwear has also declined. This shift underscores the evolving socio-economic landscape in India, with rising incomes and improved living standards reshaping consumer priorities, particularly in rural regions. The findings reflect the dynamic nature of India's consumption, aligning it with global trends. *—ANI*

IT firms prepare for modest Q3 revenue growth

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

As the quarterly earnings season approaches, the Indian IT services sector braces for a mixed performance in the third quarter of FY25, a period typically characterised by seasonal furloughs, according to a report from Centrum.

The report forecasts modest growth for Tier 1 IT companies, including TCS, Infosys, and HCL Tech. In contrast, Tier 2 firms like Coforge are expected to demonstrate more robust sequential revenue growth due to effective operational execution. Revenue growth for Tier 1 companies is projected to vary between a decline of 0.8 per cent to an increase of 3.3 per cent quarter-on-quarter in USD terms. Meanwhile, Tier 2 companies may report growth ranging from 0.1 to 3.8 per cent.

The demand for IT services in India is gradually improving, particularly in key sectors such as Banking, Financial Services, and Insurance (BFSI). *—ANI*

TO BOOST SHIPMENTS

Apparel exporters seek tax incentives before Budget

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

Apparel exporters body AEPC on Saturday urged the government to announce tax incentives, including removal of a provision requiring payments to MSMEs within 45 days to claim deductions and customs duty exemption on garment machinery imports.

The Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEPC) has also requested that an interest equalisation rate of 5 per cent be announced in the Budget, scheduled to be unveiled on 1 February by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

Other demands include extension of concessional tax rate for new manufacturing units to encourage setting up of new garment units; simplification in the procedure of imports of trims and embellishments under IGCR (Import of Goods at Concessional Rate); and liberalising e-commerce export procedures.

It added that the cap per consignment of export value under e-commerce should be increased to minimum Rs 25 lakh and export realization period should be extended to 12 months.

India's garment export sector relies heavily on imported machinery to maintain quality and global competitiveness, as domestic production is insufficient to meet demand.

"High import duties make Indian garments exports less competitive vis-a-vis countries like Bangladesh and Vietnam. AEPC recommends not only continuing existing exemptions but also reducing the customs duty to zero on remaining garmenting machinery to enhance the sector's efficiency," it said. *—PTI*

India's garment export sector relies heavily on imported machinery to maintain quality and global competitiveness **PHOTO: X**

'Media firms likely to report subdued Q3 performance'

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

A recent report by Nuvama suggests that media companies are poised for a subdued performance in the forthcoming Q3FY25 results. Although some sectors may demonstrate growth, the overall outlook remains mixed due to various factors influencing industry.

The report states, "Media companies are likely to report a muted Q3FY25." Among the key players, multiplex operator PVR INOX is projected to experience an 8 per cent year-on-year (YoY) and a 3 per cent quarter-on-quarter (QoQ) increase in revenue. This growth is attributed to higher average ticket prices, an uptick in advertising revenue, and a boost in other operating income, which are expected to rise by 9 per cent, 36 per cent, and 12 per cent QoQ, respectively. However, footfall numbers are anticipated to disappoint, declining by 4 per cent QoQ to 37.2 million, primarily due to a lacklustre October.

On a brighter note, music company Saregama is forecasted to be a standout performer, with revenues expected to soar by 52 per cent YoY and 28 per cent QoQ, fuelled by a remarkable surge in live events and improved music licensing revenues. *—ANI*

National Games torch arrives in Bageshwar

PITHORAGARH, 4 JAN

The 38th National Games' torch 'Tejaswini' reached Bageshwar on Saturday with the district sports officials and sports lovers welcoming it. Uttarakhand is hosting the event for the first time later this month. Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami flagged off the torch rally of the Games from Haldwani on 26 December, which will reach Dehradun on 25 January after visiting 99 places in 13 districts. The National Games will be held from 28 January to 14 February at Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium in Dehradun, and its mascot, anthem, logo, tagline and jersey were unveiled by the chief minister. The purpose of the torch rally is to connect more people with the Games. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Nice extends great home run with win over plucky Rennes

PARIS, 4 JAN

Nice beat Rennes 3-2 to move into fourth place in Ligue 1. Both sides produced chance after chance in an entertaining match and it was the home side which took the lead after 12 minutes. Tanguy Ndombélé's superb lofted pass put Evann Guessand through on goal and he held off a grappling defender to side-foot the opener. Former Rennes player Gaëtan Laborde made it 3-1 in first-half stoppage time with the aid of a neat assist from Guessand. Both sides pushed for more goals but Nice held on, even after Pablo Rosario was sent off in stoppage time for a high tackle. The result preserved Nice's unbeaten home record and lifted it on to 27 points, equal with Lille and two points ahead of Lyon. —*PTI*

AC Milan beats Juventus to reach Super Cup final

RIYADH, 4 JAN

AC Milan will face city rival Inter in the final of the Italian Super Cup after it beat Juventus 2-1 in semifinal in Saudi Arabia. Juventus took a first-half lead after Turkish striker Kenan Yildiz converted a sublime pass by Samuel Mbangula but AC Milan grew in the second half. Christian Pulisic equalised from the penalty spot after 71 minutes and Juventus defender Federico Gatti deflected a cross into his own net to decide the match five minutes later. AC Milan will meet Inter, which beat Atalanta in the other semifinal on Thursday, in Monday's final in Riyadh. Inter has won the last three Super Cups. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Delhi SG Pipers vie for first win in HIL

ROURKELA, 4 JAN

A keen contest is on cards as Delhi SG Pipers take on second-paced Shrachi Rarh Bengal Warriors in their third match of the Hockey India League (HIL) on Saturday. Delhi SG Pipers have drawn both their matches so far and have come from behind in both those games. The Pipers defeated Team Gonasika 4–2 in a shootout after the opening game of the tournament ended 2–2 at the end of regulation time. Delhi went down 4–5 against Hyderabad Toofans in sudden death after overturning a 0–2 deficit at the end of the first quarter. Argentine striker Tomas Domene has been Delhi SG Pipers' star player until now, scoring both goals against Gonasika in regulation time. —*ANI*

Pant's fifty sets up thrilling Test finish

India leads by 145 runs against Australia on Day 2; Bumrah undergoes precautionary scans

SYDNEY, 4 JAN

Staying true to his aggressive style of play, generational talent Rishabh Pant conjured up a spectacular 33-ball-61 to somehow keep India afloat even as Australia remained in driver's seat in the fifth Test, which is poised for an intriguing finish.

It was largely due to Pant's breathtaking knock that India finished the second day at 141 for 6 for an overall lead of 145. Pant entrained the packed SCG with four monstrous sixes and six boundaries.

His back-to-back sixes off Mitchell Starc into the heritage Ladies Members Stands were for posterity.

Pant's knock prevented Indian second innings from falling apart with the visitors top and lower order struggling to negotiate Aussie attack on a track that was aided seam and bounce.

This was after unheralded bowling duo of Prasidh Krishna (3/42) and Nitish Reddy (2/32) complemented Mohammed Siraj (3/51) and Jasprit Bumrah (2/33) to shoot Australia out for 181.

On a difficult track, Virat Kohli (6) and his top-order colleagues found Scott Boland (3/38) too hot to handle.

Kohli lost his wicket on outside the off stump line for the eighth successive time in this series.

Rishabh Pant bats during play on the second day of the fifth cricket test between India and Australia at the Sydney Cricket Ground, in Sydney, Australia **PHOTO: PTI**

The match is certain to end on the third day but if India will be able to defend the total will very much depend on whether skipper Jasprit Bumrah is fit to bowl full tilt.

Bumrah underwent precautionary scans for an unspecified injury after he left the field in the post-lunch session in which he bowled just one over.

If even a half-fit Bumrah bowls, it won't be easy for Australia to chase even a 175-run target on a track with variable bounce and widening cracks.

Pant rode on bounce and hit Webster over point but the two sixes off Starc do take the cake. It was understood that Pant was mentally not in frame due to unsolicited sermons from a coaching staff member, who despite knowing the dashing southpaw's game told him to play otherwise. —*PTI*

Not going anywhere, just left this Test: Rohit

SYDNEY, 4 JAN

Senior India batter Rohit Sharma on Saturday firmly dismissed his retirement rumours, saying he is "not going anywhere" and offered poor form as the reason for him "standing down" from the ongoing Sydney Test against Australia.

Grappling with modest form, Rohit "opted to rest" from the Sydney Test, handing over the leadership duties to Jasprit Bumrah, sparking widespread speculations about his future.

"I have not retired. I stood down, that is what I would say. Basically the chat that I had with the coach and the selector was very simple. I am not able to score runs, there is no form, it is an important match and we need a player with form," Rohit told Star Sports.

In Rohit's absence, Shubman Gill was included in the India eleven for the crucial fifth match of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy as India is trailing 1-2.

Rohit's bold call triggered speculations that he might pull the plug on his Test career after this series.

Players are made of steel, outside noise doesn't affect us, focus on retaining trophy
-Rohit Sharma, Indian Captain

"But there is no guarantee that the bat will not work after 5 months. There is no guarantee that the bat will not work after two months or six months down the line," Rohit said. —*PTI*

Saikia set to take over as BCCI Secy, Prabhtej treasurer

MUMBAI, 4 JAN

Devajit Saikia on Saturday filed his nomination for the post of the BCCI secretary whereas Prabhtej Bhatia applied for the post of the treasurer, with both officials being the only applicants for the two roles.

Chhattisgarh State Cricket Sangh's Bhatia has applied for the treasurer's position after the post was left vacant by the exit of Ashish Shelar, who recently took oath as a cabinet minister in the Maharashtra government.

On the other hand, Saikia has been working as the interim secretary of the Indian cricket board since Jay Shah took over as the ICC chairman on 1 December.

Devajit Saikia **PHOTO:X**

Saikia was nominated as the interim secretary by the BCCI president Roger Bonny after Shah had left the role.

As per the election schedule on the board's website, the window to file the nomination application was open till 4:00pm on Saturday afternoon and according to sources, only Saikia and Bhatia have put forth their nominations. —*PTI*

WORLD TENNIS TOUR

Senthil, Revathi to lead India

NEW DELHI, 4 JAN

India's top junior players, Senthil Kumar and Maaya Rajeshwaran Revathi, will lead the country's challenge in the boys and girls categories, respectively, at the ITF J300 event, starting 6 January at the DLTA complex here.

Apart from Senthil, who made a number of finals on the ITF junior circuit in season 2024, India's other top-5 players, Hitesh Chauhan (R3), Arnav Paparkar (R4), and Varun Verma (R5) -- have also secured their places in the main draw of the boys tournament.

From among the players from abroad, Nikta Bilozertsev, the world number 87 from Ukraine and Turkey's Haydar Cem Gokpinar (R111) will also vie for the top honour.

World number 51 Yoana Konstantinova from Bulgaria, world number 71 Eleejah Inisan from France and her compatriot Daphnee Mpetshi Perricard (R73) are the top draws in the girls singles event.

Ada Kumru (R74) and Petra Konjikusic (R75) are the other top-100 players to feature in the tournament.

Senthil Kumar and Maaya Rajeshwaran Revathi **PHOTO: X**

Rishita Reddy Basireddy is the only other Indian player in the girls singles main draw while several others will strive to make their way from the qualifying event.

The qualifying tournament that is offering eight places in the main draws is currently underway. —*PTI*

Madrid returns to La Liga top slot

MADRID, 4 JAN

Jude Bellingham missed a penalty but scored a late winner and Vinicius Jr. was sent off as 10-man Real Madrid fought back in the most dramatic of fashions to beat Valencia 2–1 and return to the top of La Liga.

Luka Modric's 85th minute equaliser and Bellingham's stoppage time winner ensured that Madrid avoided back-to-back defeats in La Liga for the first time since 2019.

The match at the Mestalla pitted second from bottom against second from top. Things got worse for Real with 11 minutes remaining when Vinicius pushed goalkeeper Stole Dimitrievski and got a red card.

However, even with a man less there was a sense of inevitability as Real pushed for a winner, and five minutes into added time Bellingham made up for his earlier miss. —*PTI*

Answer to my critics: Para shuttler Nithya on Award

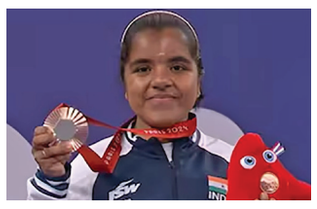
NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

Paralympic bronze medallist and Arjuna Award winner Nithya Sre Sumathy Sivan still remembers those tearful days at school when relentless bullying left her devastated and depressed.

Now a successful shuttler, the 19-year-old believes the prestigious award has come as a just reward for those days of turmoil.

"When I was in 6th or 7th standard, there was not much growth in me. In schools, there was bullying. I used to be very sad. I used to cry for every small thing. So, yeah, it's kind of an answer to them that I can also do something and achieve big," Nithya told PTI.

Reflecting on her achievements, she added, "I have seen so many of my co-athletes who are winning awards and are achievers. So, getting one of the national awards is something very prestigious.



Nithya Sre Sumathy Sivan **PHOTO: X**

"It is a proud moment for me. All the medals and awards are like a gift for me — a recognition of my hard work, dedication to the game, practicing every day, following everything, and being disciplined."

Born and raised in Hosur, Tamil Nadu, Nithya had lost her mother when she was just one year old. —*PTI*

Brisbane Int'l SF: Dimitrov retires with groin injury

BRISBANE, 4 JAN

Defending Brisbane International champion Grigor Dimitrov retired from his semifinal match Saturday to give Jiri Lehecka a shot at a second Australian title.

Trailing 6-4, 4-4, world No. 10 Dimitrov received treatment on his groin and hip region at Pat Rafter Arena. He went off court and then attempted to play on before retiring to send the 23-year-old Lehecka into his fourth ATP final.

"I hope it's nothing serious for Grigor; the first set and first half of the second had a good level," Lehecka said. "I'd like to finish the match in a different way, but hopefully he'll be all right." —*PTI*

Novak Djokovic and Reilly Opelka **PHOTO: X**

BRISBANE, 4 JAN

Novak Djokovic was beaten 7–6 (6), 6–3 by big-serving Reilly Opelka in the Brisbane International (BI) quarterfinals.

The 37-year-old Djokovic was playing his first tournament of the year. The 24-time Grand Slam champion is preparing for the Australian Open, which starts on Jan. 12 and which he has won 10 times.

"Amazing tennis, Reilly. Absolutely deserved," Djokovic wrote on Instagram.

Opelka served 16 aces – including one to finish off each set – to earn one of the biggest wins of the American's career.

"I was just focused on my spots. If I hit them, it's hard to get them back. If there's anyone that can, it's him. We have nothing to lose coming in against him. He's the greatest player ever," Opelka said.

"So you end up playing more free and you take a lot more risk. If you play your normal level or even above a normal level, he's going to win every time. So it's tough in his position because he gets guys that are good players that they roll the dice. And on a on a day like this when a lot of things go my way that's how it works out." New coach Andy Murray will join Djokovic in Melbourne.

Opelka achieved a career-high ranking of No. 17 in February 2022 before undergoing hip surgery later that year. He's now No. 293. "It was tough. A lot of uncertainty, a lot of doubt," Opelka said. —*PTI*

CONTEMPLATING CHANGES

PGA Tour mulls C'ship format change

KAPALUA, 4 JAN

The PGA Tour is contemplating another change to the format at the Tour Championship (TC) to crown a FedEx Cup champion as part of its response to what fans, television and corporate partners want to see.

Two PGA Tour officials said several concepts are still under discussion as officials review what effect it would have on everything from corporate hospitality at East Lake in Atlanta to determining the best way to reward the top performances.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity. One person directly involved in studying the various concepts said none has been brought to the Players Advisory Council.

The Athletic first reported on movement toward a format change for the season finale.

Changes need approval by the PGA Tour board **PHOTO: ANI**

Changes need approval by the PGA Tour board. The official said while not impossible, it was unlikely to be decided before this year's Tour Championship.

The tour is leaning toward a bracket of seeds, which is not necessarily straight match play. While considered the purest format in golf competition, match play on television can be less compelling as the field shrinks, especially for fans who have only one match on the course.

- Two PGA Tour officials said several concepts are still under discussion as officials review what effect it would have on everything

One of the options involves stroke play to narrow the field and a form of medal matches, which is head-to-head stroke play, assuring 18 holes. Another idea being reviewed is having matches decide positions from No. 1 through No. 8, with a big discrepancy in prize money.

Scottie Scheffler won the FedEx Cup last year and earned a $25M bonus.

Commissioner Jay Monahan had said in his year-end remarks to the staff that "everything is on the table," and that includes the Tour Championship. —*PTI*

Matsuyama clinches halfway lead at PGA Tour

KAPALUA, 4 JAN

Japanese star Hideki Matsuyama charged into a one-stroke lead through 36-holes at The Sentry as he kept up his bold chase to begin his 2025 PGA Tour campaign on a winning note.

The 32-year-old had plenty of reasons to be happy at the Plantation Course on Friday as he snared eighth birdies for a bogey-free second round of 65 and 16-under total to lead from fellow major champion Collin Morikawa (65) in the season-opening USD 20M Signature event.

Four players – Corey Conners (66), Maverick McNealy (64), Tom Hoge (68) and Thomas Detry (65) – were tied third at 14-under.

Matsuyama was however disappointed he didn't go lower as he made pars on three of the par-5s, including a frustrating three-putt on the 18th hole.

Matsuyama's trusty iron play saw him convert six birdies from inside of eighth feet while he drained a 35-footer on the par-3 11th hole with the new putter.

The tenacious Japanese has established himself as the most successful Asian golfer on the PGA Tour with 10 career titles, and he will be keen to add to his tally on the famous holiday isle.

Matsuyama's back-to-back 65s also saw him equal his second-lowest 36-hole score on Tour. —*PTI*